SHORT STORIES.

No. 720.] Week ending October 18th, 1902. [One Penny.

"I declare an impediment. This man is a murderer!" gasped the convict in a voice quivering with emotion.

(A Thrilling Incident from the Story "That Consummate Villain," on page 106.)

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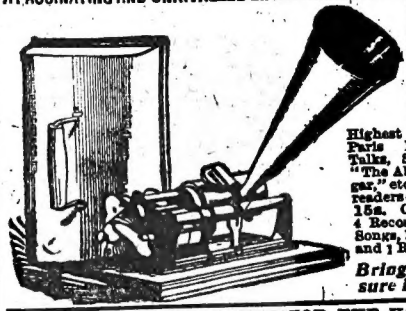

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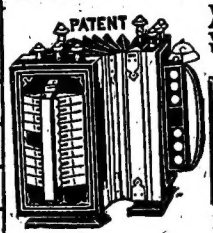

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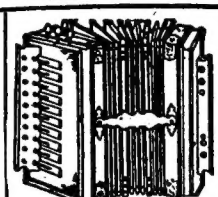

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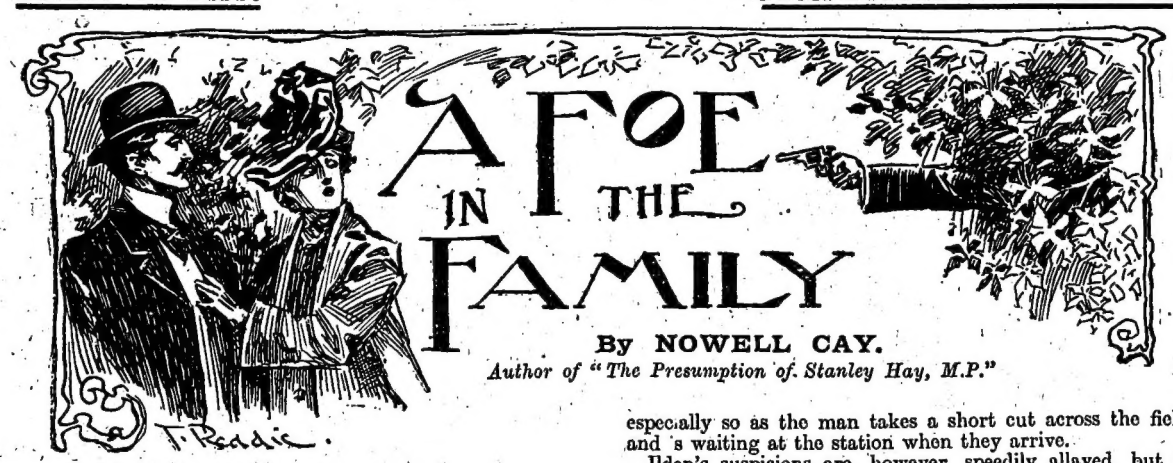

The Lady of the Bank Notes.

WHILE returning one evening to Pennybrook Hall, the residence of his uncle Jasper, Lord Ilden discovers a young girl in great distress at having lost two five pound notes, the whole of her wages for six months as a country governess. Together they search for the missing money; but as it is getting dusk, and Lord Ilden wants to get rid of his pretty companion, who turns out to be the sister of one of his old college chums, he manages to substitute two of his own notes and return them to her. She goes away overflowing with gratitude.

When she has disappeared, however, Lord Ilden continues the search. He fails to find the money, but instead discovers an envelope addressed to himself, the contents of which he has never seen. The envelope is addressed in a girl's handwriting, and is postmarked "Lallerton." Pocketing his find, Lord Ilden is lighting a cigarette, when the report of a rifle suddenly breaks the stillness of the evening, and a bullet whizzes just past him and buries itself in a tree behind.

"That," mutters Lord Ilden, "is the third attempt which has been made on my life during my stay at Pennybrook Hall."

On his return to his uncle's, he tells his cousin, Catherine Hay, of his adventure, and, feeling assured that the attempts are being made by some member of the family, many of whom would profit considerably by his death, proposes marriage to her as a means of reducing the value of his own death to his enemies. Whilst very anxious about his safety, and only too willing to help him as much as she can, Cathie, however, explains her inability to marry him.

Meanwhile Lord Ilden has discovered that it is his cousin Percival who opened the post-bag and extracted the letter addressed to himself, the envelope of which he found in the coppice.

That same evening Lord Ilden's butler discovers a large quantity of poison in his master's flask. This makes the fourth attempt.

Upon receiving the news, Lord Ilden considers it wisest to leave Pennybrook Hall at once. He is driving to the station with Cathie when they overtake a man who appears to take a great interest in them. Ilden's suspicions are instantly aroused, especially so as the man takes a short cut across the fields, and is waiting at the station when they arrive.

Ilden's suspicions are, however, speedily allayed, but his curiosity considerably excited when he discovers this gentleman in one of the carriages in the train he is about to enter in animated conversation with Florence Courthorpe, the lady of the bank notes.

(The above is a short summary of the opening chapters.)

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CHAPTER IV.
Who Would Benefit.

As Lord Ilden glanced into the railway compartment, Florence Courthorpe's eyes had met his and brightened with a shy smile of recognition. He raised his hat and passed on to where Jardine was holding open for him the door of a first-class carriage.

"You have taken tickets for Ilden Market?"

"Yes, my lord."

"That is right. Give me mine and put the small Gladstone in here with me. You will go on to the Castle with the rest of the luggage, and remain there till you hear from me. I shall not change at Rickerby, but go on with the train."

The well-trained valet's face expressed no shade of surprise at the announcement.

"Yes, my lord."

"If anybody inquires about me, they may as well imagine that I am remaining at Pennybrook. You can give any explanation you like of your own return."

"Yes, my lord. I understand."

Catherine hurried up as he disappeared.

"Is he not in the train?" she asked excitedly.

"Yes, but he is with a young lady, and I do not care to interrupt their *tête-à-tête*. I think that we have been exciting ourselves about him without cause, Cathie. He was no doubt waiting for her when we overtook him, and the sight of the wagonette galloping to the station, reminded him that the train was due and that she must be in advance of him."

His cousin was not willing to dismiss her suspicions so abruptly.

"Perhaps the woman is an accomplice who has been watching the station," she said, and Ilden smiled his sphinx-like smile.

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"I do not think so, because she told me yesterday evening that she was leaving Pennybrook this morning."

"You know her then?"

"As a lady above suspicion," said Ilden, and as he spoke the train started, leaving his cousin, if possible, more anxious about him than ever. The case as it stood had been disturbing enough without the introduction of a woman into it.

Coming away through the booking-office she dried her eyes hastily at the sight of Grant Ilden, who was just handing his bicycle over to the charge of a porter.

A tinge of colour came into Cathie's cheeks as she saw him.

"I did not know you were so anxious to see Cousin George off," she said. "What a pity! You are just too late."

"I can survive the misfortune," he said distantly. "I at least can contemplate 'my lord's' departure without profound sorrow. Now that he is gone there will perhaps be some chance for a mere ordinary person to enjoy a little of your society."

"Not if the mere ordinary person is going to be objectionable. I cannot understand why you 'scorched' down to the station if you care so little for George."

"I thought that you might not care to return alone, but, of course, if you want to think over the secrets you have been exchanging I do not wish to interrupt you."

"Now that is considerate of you," she said with teasing irony. "But as you are here, I suppose we may as well walk together. That is, if you don't mind walking. I told the wagonette not to wait. As for the secrets Cousin George has been telling me, I want to think over them very seriously indeed. But I don't think you will interfere with my thoughts. In fact you may help them. Do you know by sight any of the men who have lent your Uncle Jasper money."

Grant's handsome, melancholy face flushed angrily.

"You are playing with me," he said. "Ilden was not talking to you about Uncle Jasper's debts, and if he was, it was not *that* that made you cry."

Catherine drew herself up.

"I did not know that you were trying to discover what Cousin George and I talked about."

The accusation was near enough to the truth to make him apologetic.

Cathie received his disclaimers with becoming severity.

"And now suppose that you answer my question," she said, when he had finished. "Do you know your uncle's creditors by sight?"

They had left the station behind them now, and were turning into the "short cut" across the fields, which had enabled the "unknown" to catch his train.

The poet's melancholy was disappearing under the influence of Catherine's society, and the knowledge that he had her all to himself, with Lord Ilden well out of the way.

"Uncle Jay's creditors!" he repeated. "That is rather a large order. He owes *me* half-a-crown."

"But the money-lenders?" she said, very seriously. "The men to whom he owes large sums? Do you know any of them by sight?"

"I have met Isaacs. Percival tried to get an advance out of him on the strength of his expectations—which are worth nothing—and nearly got into trouble over it. Percy is such a reckless fool. Isaacs said that he led him to believe that he was Lord Ilden himself, and the Pater had to pay a good deal to hush it up. That is how the money goes. If Percy were content with his allowance, I might not be a pauper."

He spoke very bitterly, and Cathie, who knew that he suffered enough from his brother's complete selfishness to excuse the absence of any fraternal sympathy or championship, felt very sorry for him; but she was too intent on her investigations to say so.

"And what sort of a man is this Isaacs to look at?" she asked.

"He is the picture of a Jewish patriarch. At heart he is a skinflint, and looks like a beaming philanthropist."

"An old man?"

"He looks eighty."

Catherine lost interest in Mr. Isaacs.

"Have you noticed, in Pennybrook or anywhere," she asked, a tall, thin man, with hooked features and strange, fierce-looking, dark eyes, who walks with his hands behind his back? You recognise the description?"

Grant had started.

"Yes, if he dresses in black and wears a black slouch hat. What do you know about him?"

"Nothing except that he went off by this train. I wondered who he could be."

"And you put him down as a money-lender. That is not a bad idea," said Grant thoughtfully, "although I should not think it is Uncle Jay that he came to bother."

"Whom then?"

"Percy. I have been wondering what they had to do with each other."

Cathie turned sick. Was it possible that Percival Ilden, a man who had lived in the same house with her, and with whom she had spoken familiarly, could really be involved in a plot against his cousin's life.

"Tell me all you know about this man," she said excitedly. "Who is he, and what has he had to do with your brother?"

"Oh! I know nothing. I have only seen him once in my life—yesterday evening. Percy and I happened to be coming home from the moors together—wrangling as usual, when in one of the lanes we saw the man you have described walking along slowly before us just as you have described, with his shoulders bent and his hands behind his back.

Percy did not notice him, and I said nothing until looking up I found the fellow had suddenly disappeared from sight. 'Hello! where's that apparition gone to?' I said, for the lane is pretty straight there, and I knew there were no side paths leading out of it. But I really spoke to show Percy that I was not listening. He was 'rowing' me because I had let something out to the Pater, and what I said made him stop at once.

He seemed in an awful funk when I told him what I had seen, and what the man was like, and surprised me by wanting to turn back. I was not going to do that, and have an extra mile's tramp instead of seeing where the man in front had got to. I said so to Percy. 'You can do as you like,' he said, 'but I am going back. If you see the fellow have a good look at him, and tell me what he is like.'

I had been laughing at him for being superstitious, but I saw that it was no superstition. He thought it was some man that he was trying to avoid, and I went on alone. As I half expected, the apparition was waiting in an inlet of the hedge, where it hid him from anybody coming along. It was under the shadow of a tree, and I should have passed him without noticing that there was anybody there at all if I had not been on the look-out. The fact that he seemed deliberately trying to avoid observation made me determined to have a look at him, so I asked him for a light.

He said he had not got one, but I pretended to find one as he spoke in my own vesta case, and stopped talking to him while I lighted up. That is how I saw his face. When Percy got home and I described him he seemed jolly serious about it, and the next I heard was that he was leaving by the next train. My idea is that he went on purpose to avoid that man in the lane."

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Catherine was only bewildered by what she heard. She did not know what to think. Had Percival found his life in danger, as George had done? If so, the plot against the Ilden family must be a widespread one, and the only theory by which her cousin had tried to explain it was disproved. The only person who could gain by Percival's death joined to that of Lord Ilden was Grant himself, and he was plainly above suspicion.

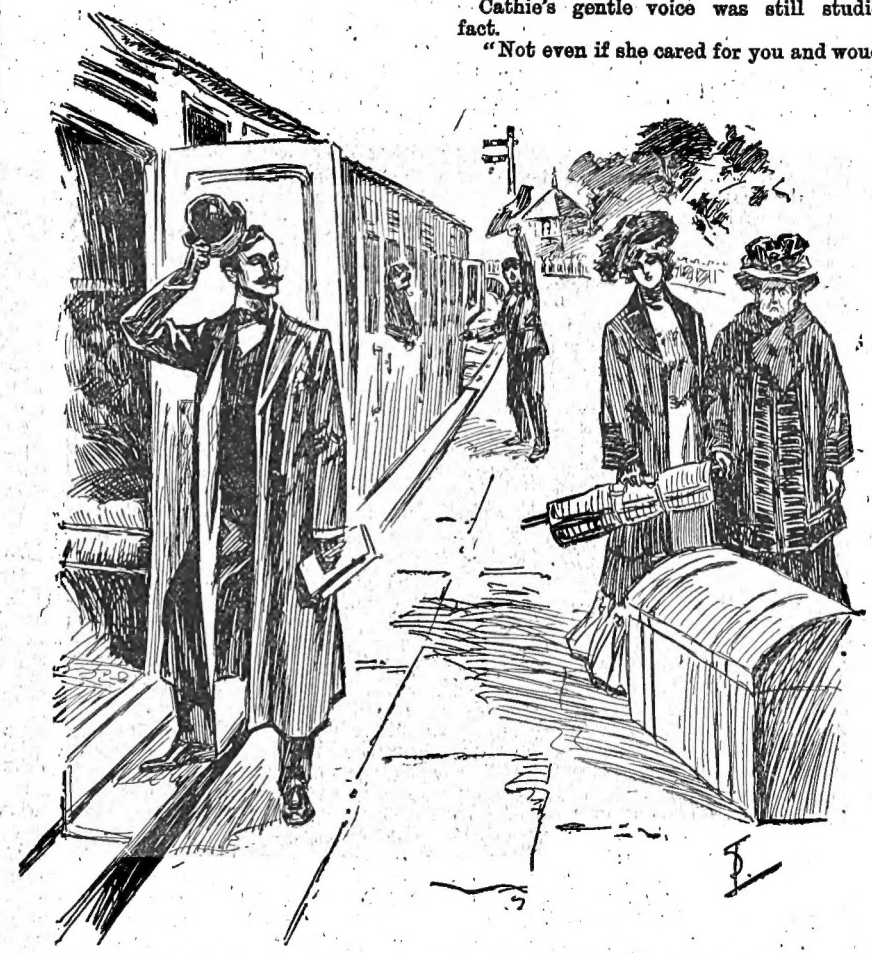
She surprised him by an apparently irrelevant question.

"If George, and both his uncles, and your brother and yourself all died without heirs, who would get the title and property?"

"That is rather a poser," he said with a laugh. "I have never thought. But I suppose Jane and her children, if she has any, would have a 'look in.'"

Cathie felt bewildered by the increasing field of suspicion. She found herself remembering that Lady Barton had always seemed to her a very unprincipled girl, and that her husband, the baronet, had not a pleasant face, and she pulled herself up. Surely she was letting George's line of reasoning carry her too far.

It was better to find some fresh explanation of Percival Ilden's departure. She wondered whether he was in league with the "Unknown," and had been nervous only of the connection between them being discovered.



The governess inclined her head in a graceful farewell, while her new employer glared at him with the most forbidding expression.

"Do you know where your brother has gone?" she asked, and felt confirmed in her new suspicion when she found that, unlike George, he had made no secret of his whereabouts.

"He has gone to Paris," said Grant, "because the Washington Smiths are there. I suppose we shall hear that he is engaged to the heiress, if he is lucky."

"You think that Percival is in love with her?" asked Catherine, and the poet shrugged his shoulders.

"He is in love with her money. The old American is anxious, though, to get a title for his daughter. Percy would be all right if he had a real chance of the succession. Not that he cares a toss for the girl. Of course he will have to marry money if he marries at all, but it is a thing I could not do."

"Of course not—simply for money," said Cathie, her voice very matter-of-fact. "But if you happened to care for somebody who happened to have money, there could be no reason then why you should not ask her to marry you, could there?"

"There'd be every reason in the world while I remain a pauper," he said hotly and bitterly. "Even if I had Percival's allowance it might be different, but to know that I could not even keep myself without my wife's assistance! No, I could not do it. I could never respect myself."

Cathie's gentle voice was still studiously matter-of-fact.

"Not even if she cared for you and would not marry anybody else?"

Grant glanced at her quickly with a strange light in his handsome, melancholy eyes, but found the plain, sympathetic little face particularly indifferent and unexpressive.

"Thank Heaven, I should never know that she cared for me," he said.

Catherine laughed rather nervously.

"Unless she told you. What should you do then?"

The poet sighed.

"I should beg her to forget me."

Catherine cast down her eyes.

"I think that would be rather cruel," she said, and was half relieved and half sorry when she saw her mother coming to meet her, and realised that the rather embarrassing *tête-à-tête* was at an end.

Mr. Ray at the Black Bull.

Meanwhile Lord Ilden was continuing his journey, feeling more than ever conscious of the ridiculously romantic nature of his flight. He had allowed his cousin's nervous suspicion of the stranger on the road to affect him to a certain extent, and make him imagine the most sinister motives for his actions. And then the fact that he knew and was travelling with Florence Courthorpe had rendered the "Unknown" abruptly an ordinary person, and made Ilden ashamed of the tether he had given to his imagination

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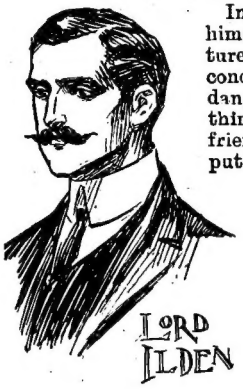

In place of his suspicion he allowed himself to entertain some slight feature of jealousy against him. The concentration of his mind on his own danger had left him little leisure for thinking about the sister of his dead friend; he had more or less consciously put her affairs on one side to be considered when his mind was free. For the present she had obtained a situation, and he could no doubt obtain her address from the Rector of Pennybrook whenever he wished. But he had taken it as a matter of course that he must do something to help her. It seemed preposterous that Gerald Courthorpe's sister should be giving her services to middle-class people and sacrificing her independence for twenty pounds a year. If he interested his mother's sister, the Marchioness of Dalmenay, in her, something better at least than governess work might be found for her. The thought of helping a girl who had been so readily grateful had not been without its pleasurableness, but something of the pleasure had been due to the idea she had given him that help could come to her from no other source.

The possibility of her having another champion was not altogether welcome. He busied himself wondering again from a different point of view, but with scarcely less curiosity, who the stranger could be who had hurried to the station to accompany Florence Courthorpe on her journey.

It was only by an effort of will that he recalled his mind to the thought of his own adventure, and reminded himself that, leaving Florence Courthorpe's friend out of consideration, he had started with the expectation of being followed and avoiding pursuit.

The false suspicion had prevented him giving a thought to any of his other fellow passengers when he entered the train, and he set his mind on the alert to repair the omission as the train neared the little junction of Rickerby.

It was here that he would change trains if he were really returning to the Castle. If anybody were following him from Pennybrook they were likely to take some interest in the movements of his luggage and his valet. Remaining in the train he would have a good opportunity of keeping a counter watch upon them, and Ilden ensconced himself at a little distance from the window of his compartment to see without being seen as the train slackened speed and drew up at the platform.

The train for Ilden Market was already standing at the other side, ready to start. That from Pennybrook was, as usual, some minutes behind time, and there was bustle and excitement in moving the luggage from one train to the other.

Ilden kept his attention directed on his own trunks, which Jardine was seeing out of the van. For a moment or two they were almost obscured by the little crowd of passengers moving from one train to the other. Then as these took their seats and the platform was left comparatively clear, Ilden was interested to see that Florence Courthorpe's friend was leaving her. He was not travelling with her to her destination, it seemed, and for a moment this was the only thought in the mind of the man watching him. Then involuntarily he recalled Catherine's original suspicion against him, for the "Unknown" had strolled with apparent purposelessness past the pile of luggage on the platform, glancing furtively at the labelling, and, as if satisfied by the inspection, had taken his place in the train to Ilden Market. At the same moment Ilden's moved on, and he had leisure to think over the man's action, and wonder what it meant. After all he had been a little premature perhaps in thinking that his acquaintance with Miss Courthorpe cleared him entirely from suspicion. It is possible for the best people to have undesirable acquaintances, and if the man was really pursuing him he would naturally presume upon the slightest acquaintance to enter into conversation with Miss Courthorpe by way of disarming suspicion.

George smiled to himself. The incident of Miss Courthorpe's presence in the train might advantage him more than the stranger. If the latter were really pursuing him, as his action suggested, to Ilden Market, he could employ the time by ascertaining who he was.

The spirit of intrigue and adventure, which he had failed to feel very acutely so far, quickened in his mind at the thought. At the next stoppage he would change compartments, and begin investigations by questioning "the lady of the bank-notes." The inception of a plan, however slight, came as a relief. So far he had no object in his journey except to prevent his movements being traced from Pennybrook. Lallerton, he had discovered by a careful perusal of his cycling map, was a village within three miles or so of Shipton Gate, one of the stations he would have passed if he had gone with his luggage to Ilden Market. The fact had dissuaded him from going there at once. If anybody was following him from Pennybrook they would be sure to see him leave the train at Shipton Gate, and in such a little place would find it easy to trace him to his destination. He could feel no security there until he could know that he had first thrown any possible pursuer off the scent.

To-day the whim of the moment should decide where his journey ended. To-morrow he would go on to Lallerton in the hope of solving the mystery of the intercepted letter. And, meanwhile, it would be something to know that he was discovering the name of a possible foe.

When the train slackened speed again he lifted his Gladstone from the rack, preparatory to changing compartments when it stopped. But when he opened the door and stepped out on the platform, it was to find an unexpected interference with his programme.

Miss Courthorpe was stepping out of the train also. This was her destination no doubt, and he must choose between ending his own journey abruptly with her, or leaving his questions unasked for the present.

Miss Courthorpe had already recognised him again with a little start of surprise. No doubt she was imagining him in the other train on his way to Ilden Market, and George imagined that he saw a little disturbed dismay in her face as well as surprise.

He wondered whether it was due to the presence of a grimly sedate-looking matron who had been waiting on the platform and was advancing now to claim the governess.

This was, no doubt, Miss Courthorpe's new "employer," and her presence would make the interview on which he had been counting impossible.

A porter was hurrying up to take his bag, but found his services unnecessary. Ilden was returning to his compartment to continue his journey.

"Can you tell me who that lady is?' he asked with a glance at the matron.

"Yes, sir, that is Mrs. Morgan Wright, the doctor's wife," said the porter.

"And lives here, I suppose," said Ilden, taking a mental note of the name of the station, "Witterby."

"Yes, sir, at Minerva House on the other side of the village."

It was all that Ilden wanted to know. He had, no doubt, obtained the address at which he could write to Miss Courthorpe and make any inquiries he pleased about her companion of the train, and he settled himself to continue his journey.

The governess was standing by her luggage on the platform with her companion as the train moved on, and inclined her graceful head in a timid farewell, while Mrs. Morgan Wright stared at him with a forbidding air of

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disapproval, which quickened his pity for the girl delivered over to the tender mercies of such a severe-looking female.

The departure of the governess had left him again a little bored by his journey. There was no reason why he should continue it, and at the next station he left the train, deposited his bag in the cloak-room under the name of "Mr. Ray"—the first which suggested itself—and paid his fare from Rickerby at the gate.

He had been the only passenger to alight; but a rather spiritless determination to carry out his programme and make pursuit impossible demanded that he should place some miles between himself and the station before he looked out for an inn at which to take up his abode for the day. He started off at random, enjoying the tramp along winding country roads after the inaction of the train, and it was not till an hour's quick walking had given him a healthy appetite for lunch that he drew up at a picturesque little inn which seemed to mark the beginning of a village. Opposite the inn a tall, square house fronted the road without the reserve of a garden front. The two buildings seemed to Ilden like sentinels guarding the straggling street that lay beyond. Afterwards he would explore it. For the present lunch was the great necessity, and, entering the Black Bull through a pleasant, old-fashioned garden, he was ushered into a sweet-smelling room, looking out, as he had hoped, across the garden on the road.

Here was the peaceful spot he wanted in which to consider his position and map out a plan of action, and when his lunch had appeared and shown itself as satisfactory as the place, he settled that for one night at least the Black Bull should be his home, and he engaged a bedroom.

After lunch he lighted a cigar to think. The only plan in his mind at present, that of visiting Lallerton, was rather an apology for a plan, proclaiming his actual dearth of practical intention.

He was depending entirely upon a mere unsupported theory of what the intercepted letter had contained, and when he got there he would have to depend upon chance to render the visit of any use. And he would have to pass there under his own name. Here he had already given himself the protection of a false one.

For the present he had no doubt rendered his existence safe enough, but he could not consent to bury himself like this indefinitely, and at the end feel no safer than at the beginning. It would be different if he were married and with every year was rendering his own life of less importance to the many people interested in the succession.

Once more the idea of marriage recurred as a perfect counter-move to the intrigues which surrounded him. To marry and live in retirement with his wife for a year or two. But, even if he were willing to sacrifice his liberty for the baffling of his enemies, what lady of his acquaintance could he ask to marry him as he would have to marry, quickly, privately, and with the prospect of a long and anxious exile from England after the ceremony. He would not care to propose it to any of the girls whom his aunt, the Marchioness, had catalogued as suitable wives for him.

No, his only course was to discover, in the first place, who his enemy was, and as a first step he called for notepaper and envelopes to write to Miss Courthorpe.

But with the pen in his hand he realised that the writing of the letter was difficult. What reason could he give for addressing her at all or expressing so much curiosity about her travelling companion, let alone for asking her to address her reply to "Mr. Ray."

The writing of letters was not one of Lord Ilden's gifts, and he stared through the white curtained window for inspiration. His gaze wandered idly across the old-fashioned garden and the road to the severe-looking house opposite. There was a name carved over its doorway, and he tried idly to decipher it.

Then he started suddenly to his feet, staring at the lettering with an interest that was no longer idle, for the name carved over the doorway was "Minerva House," and he realised for the first time that the red lamp below it announced it as the home of a doctor. All unconsciously his wanderings had brought him back to Witterby, and he had settled down exactly opposite the new home of Florence Courthorpe.

"Well, it will save the trouble of writing," he said to himself with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "I am sure to meet her."

"Where is Lord Ilden?" she asked in excited tones. But the innkeeper could only stare at the fair apparition in mute astonishment.

Still Another Attempt.

FLORENCE COURTHORPE sat at the open window of her bedroom and reviewed the events of the day.

It was barely ten o'clock yet, for the doctor's household retired early. Mrs. Morgan Wright had informed her of the fact in an aggressive tone which suggested an inclination on the governess's part to keep late hours, but Florence had received the announcement with relief. The afternoon and evening had seemed intolerably long to her. For already she had realised that her life at Witterby was to be as uncongenial a one as it had been at Pennybrook Rectory. Mrs. Wright was a sharp-voiced woman who had evidently been prejudiced against her by Mrs. Haydon. Here as at Pennybrook she was to be classed as a designing young woman, because the highly-objectionable son of the house there had persecuted her with unwel-

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come attentions. Mrs. Wright's prejudice had clearly been increased by the presence of Lord Ilden in the train by which her governess arrived and his recognition, and she made no secret of her opinion that a governess ought not to have any acquaintances of the other sex.

"And who may that man be?" she had asked before they were out of the station, and Florence had felt her face redden, she scarcely knew why, as she gave Ilden's name and title.

"He was a great friend of my brother's at Rugby," she added as she noticed the matron's expression of mingled incredulity and disapproval.

"And has this Lord Ilden been travelling with you from Pennybrook?" asked the doctor's wife with acid suspicion.

Florence explained innocently that his lordship had travelled from Pennybrook in the same train, but that they had not met, and she flushed again with involuntary anger this time at the next question.

"I am not to understand, I hope, that the young man is following you?"

This was the woman with whom her lot was to be cast for a future of indefinite length, and her heart sank at the prospect.

The doctor she found to be a meek and silent little man who seemed to live in some fear of his wife. Her two charges, a sharp featured, impertinent little girl who took after her mother in looks, and a dull boy who took after his father, completed the family, and Florence tried in vain to look forward to teaching them with pleasure. A preliminary attempt in the afternoon had shown them both determined not to learn.

But although her new life had opened so unpromisingly, the girl was far from feeling unhappy as she sat by her open window looking out on the moonlight road, and the little inn across it, with here and there a window illuminated. Florence herself sat in a dark room, for Mrs. Wright had spoken emphatically on the subject of candles, and Florence had undressed very quickly to blow out the light before there was any danger of it suggesting extravagance in the morning.

But she knew that it was impossible to sleep. Her mind was too full of thought.

She recalled her first night at Haydon Rectory, the commencement of her life as a paid dependent. She had been received much more kindly there—it was afterwards that Sidney Haydon's infatuation rendered his mother vindictive—but even after a kind reception she had spent the night in tears. She wondered a little at her cheerfulness now. Was it that she had learnt to accept the inevitable philosophically?

"What one cannot change one can always bear," she said to herself. "One need not think about the unpleasant things."

And she did not know herself that she was able to forget the unpleasantness of her surroundings so easily because her mind was so full of a pleasanter subject. She was scarcely conscious of the completeness with which her dead brother's friend filled her thoughts.

He had always stood to her for a hero, chiefly, no doubt, because he was her brother's. Gerald Courthorpe's enthusiasm had made him a model of chivalry and of all the virtues, and her desire to see the modern Bayard had been frustrated on one score and another until her brother's death made her cease remotely to hope for it. And then at the moment when she felt most neglected and friendless, when Mrs. Haydon's unkindness and the uncertainty of the future had driven her out to her favourite walk in the coppice for a good cry, only to increase her distress by the supposed loss of her just paid salary—it was then when her surroundings seemed darkest and her need of a friend most great, that "Bayard" had appeared to lift her out of her grief with a characteristic generosity and chivalry. He had made demands on her admiration and gratitude, and the revelation of his identity had appeared to her the most romantic thing in her life—the life that held so little romance now.

No wonder that the thought of her dead brother's friend conquered her mind to the exclusion of her troubles.

They had mingled with them, and relief at leaving the Rectory had tinged itself with regret that she was losing all chance of seeing Lord Ilden again.

It had seemed quite an event to her when she saw him leaving Pennybrook in the same train as herself. He was returning no doubt to Ilden Castle, and Florence was conscious of a keen disappointment that she had not succeeded in catching another glimpse of him crossing the platform at Rickerby Junction.

The day had been indeed a succession of vague wishes and startlingly unexpected fulfilments. There had been the discovery at Witterby that Lord Ilden had not left the train at the junction after all, and then when it had carried him away and she had finally made up her mind that this glimpse of him was her last, had come the strangest and most startling coincidence of all. The tall, handsome figure which she had seen carried away by the train had appeared in the little inn exactly opposite her new home.

From the windows of the schoolroom she had seen him stroll out and return as she battled with her contumacious charges in the afternoon, and had scarcely been able to believe her eyes. After that her duties had seemed less trying, and her position less friendless. It was easy to determine that her mind should not dwell on the discomforts of her new life when it was employed so busily trying to invent explanations of a wonderful coincidence.

Nor was her excited interest in the position lessened by the knowledge that Lord Ilden's presence at the Black Bull would excite suspicion in the mind of her employer. It had been exasperating at Pennybrook Rectory to incur resentment and lose her situation because an unbearable young man had persecuted her with attentions in spite of her keen dislike for him; but Florence was vaguely conscious that to suffer for the imaginary attentions of her brother's friend would have a certain sweetness.

In an indefinite way it would seem to connect them, and there was an underlying pleasure in the thought which she did not dream of analysing to herself. Mrs. Morgan Wright's impertinent suggestion that he had followed her came back. It was ridiculous, of course, but it no longer made her angry.

And, since the coincidence was so wonderful, and any explanation of it so difficult to find, a little question did insist on asking itself faintly in her mind. When Lord Ilden had shown himself so deeply sympathetic, and so keenly touched by the change in her position, might he not have taken this, the only means, of seeing her and speaking to her again?

She believed that he had intended to speak to her at Witterby station, and would have done so but for Mrs. Wright's presence, and the frightened appeal in her own eyes. He had questioned the railway porter, and the man had jerked his thumb in the direction of her employer. Could it be that Lord Ilden was ascertaining her address?

It was all very improbable, of course; but when is improbability a check to the surmises of nineteen?

The night was a romantic one. The air—very still, after a wonderful October day—made the girl at the window, in her lightly-covered night-dress, welcome the faint breath that stole in to play on her flushed cheeks.

Outside the white road wound its way to the village like a band of silver in the moonlight. The light made beautiful

the irregular red roof of the inn, with its many gables. The rest lay for the most part in intense shadow, through which the light from a window here and there shone out with a pleasant friendliness.

She was wondering whether one of the lighted windows was that of Lord Ilden's room, and, as if in answer to her wish, Ilden himself answered the question by appearing at the oblong of light beneath her and throwing up the sash to stand there enjoying the night air as she was doing.

Involuntarily Florence drew back a little, although she was quite sure that she could not be seen in the darkness. Lord Ilden was looking across now, and the girl's heart beat a little more quickly as their glances seemed to meet across the darkness, although his was an unconscious one.

Then she sighed. The figure had disappeared, and she was left anxiously waiting for an unexplained, but wholly pleasurable excitement to be repeated.

It seemed as though she would have to wait in vain, for twenty minutes went by without any sign of Ilden's reappearance. But Florence had no thought of going to bed. She felt strangely awake to-night and at the end of the twenty minutes her watch was rewarded, though not in the way she had hoped.

Something very strange was happening. The dense shadow which surrounded the lighted oblong of the window below seemed to be moving. Part of it was spreading before the light, and as the girl watched wonderingly it became the dark silhouette of a man—a man wearing a slouch hat and holding something in his hand.

He had raised his head slowly and stealthily from below the line of the window-sill as if to look into the room. Now he had risen boldly and stood surveying the interior, and as he did so a sickening sense of apprehension came to the unseen watcher, for it seemed to her that the thing he held in his hand was a revolver. The light gleamed for a moment on a bright barrel, and Florence held her breath paralysed by dread. Who the man could be she did not try to conjecture, but there could be little doubt that he intended to shoot the man in the room. Even as she looked she was expecting to hear the report and know that Lord Ilden had been treacherously murdered. The fear robbed her of all power of motion.

But the silhouetted figure was moving now. It seemed almost as though it were descending into the earth as it dropped lower and lower until only the black outline of the slouch hat was visible against the light of the open window.

The man had crouched there to wait. A quick feminine intuition showed her the position. Lord Ilden was not in the room, and the man was hiding there ready to shoot him as he entered. And at the thought the girl seemed suddenly to wake to action.

She must warn Lord Ilden before it was too late. Already she had wasted precious moments in futile watching and dread, and she threw on her dressing-gown with trembling fingers.

She was careful to make no sound as she opened the door of her room and crept down the dark and silent stairs; to be stopped would be to waste time answering questions and giving explanations, and a moment lost might mean the loss of a life.

With the same care she drew back the bolts of the hall door, and closing it behind her crept swiftly across the moonlit road.

Her heart was in her mouth now lest the waiting murderer should catch sight of her; but though the fear was there, it did not delay her footsteps for a moment.

She was panting with fear more than her running as she flew up the garden path to the inn-door within a few yards of where she had seen the man hiding, and turned the knob desperately.

The door had not been locked yet, although the inn was closed for the night, and the next moment she was inside, closing and locking the door behind her.

She breathed more freely now. Beyond her, through the dark bar extended a dimly-lighted passage. The wide-open door on the right must be that of Lord Ilden's room, and he could not enter it now without her seeing and stopping him.

She crept forward to it and looked within so far as she could without entering. The thought of the murderer outside made its place of terror.

But she was satisfied that the room was empty and she stopped at the doorway then, a little in doubt as to what she should do next, and for the first time remembered that she presented a strange figure in her dressing-gown, her bare, slippered feet and widely-flowing hair.

Such she appeared to the worthy innkeeper who had heard the door being bolted and appeared now at the end of the passage to inquire the cause of such an inexplicable sound.

He stood surveying the apparition with widely staring eyes. Nor did Florence's anxious question serve to lessen his sense of bewilderment.

"Where is Lord Ilden?" she asked with anxious directness, and the innkeeper found his tongue with difficulty.

"There ain't no gentleman of that name in this neighbourhood, Miss."

She stared at him incredulously.

"But there is a gentleman staying here?"

"Yes, Miss, a Mr. Ray."

Ilden appeared behind him as he spoke. He had been chatting with his host and hostess in the old-fashioned raftered kitchen, and followed the former in time to hear his name. His well-controlled face expressed no surprise, and little of the admiration with which the unexpected picture inspired him.

"Oh! it is Miss Courthorpe," he said, "will you come into my room?" And he was advancing to the doorway.

But at the movement, all the girl's tragic fear came back to relieve her sudden self-consciousness, and she put out her hands excitedly to stop him.

"No, not in there. A man is waiting at the window to shoot you," she cried, and Ilden's face grew a shade more grave. His fancied security had been fallacious then.

"I am greatly indebted to you then for warning me," he said quietly. "The man is in the garden, I suppose?"

"Yes, I saw him from the window of my room."

His matter-of-fact tone had come as a great relief to her, and put her at her ease. She had been afraid of incredulity.

He turned to the wondering innkeeper.

"You might tell some of your men that this fellow is hiding in the garden. He has made four attempts on my life already, and I will give twenty pounds to anyone who secures him. You must come into the kitchen, Miss Courthorpe, and sit down while we scour the garden. You must not catch cold."

"Yes, come along in, dear," chimed in the innkeeper's wife who had followed into the passage and gathered something of the position more quickly than her husband. But Florence could only think of the danger to Ilden. Her eyes met his in terrified appeal.

"But you will not expose yourself in the garden. It is you he wishes to shoot, and he has a revolver," she cried.

"As I have," said Ilden. "If there is any risk I must take my share. But I am afraid that he will have taken alarm already."

His voice expressed impatience, and forbade her to make any further remonstrance. She was conscious suddenly

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that he must be thinking her in the way, and she followed the landlady into the kitchen silently. The latter was summoning some Noah and Jabez from the premises at the back with news that there was a robber in the garden, and Florence watched with white cheeks and frightened eyes as the party of four passed out through the back, the innkeeper taking an old-fashioned blunderbuss with him.

She held her breath when they were gone, expecting every moment that the sharp report of a revolver would break in on the night silence. She could give no ear to the chatter of her companion, who only ceased in her questioning for periodical visits to the door to try and see what was passing outside. Florence answered her absently in monosyllables.

It seemed to her hours before the men came back with news that they could find no trace of the assassin. The innkeeper almost doubted his existence.

"Don't you think, miss, that you must have imagined it?" he asked, and she was grateful when Ilden answered for her.

"And now that we have frightened the fellow away, I can safely see you back across the road, Miss Courthorpe," he added.

She did not wish him to accompany her. The thought of his danger still oppressed her; but he only smiled at her objections, and they crossed the road together.

"I shall leave this place early in the morning," he said, "so I shall have no opportunity of calling to thank you, as I should wish; but I will write, if I may. I have no doubt that I owe you my life. It was a curious chance, but a very fortunate one for me, which made me take up my quarters so close to you. I came here really to hide for a little while from this unknown enemy, who seems determined to take my life; but it is evident that I have not succeeded, and the quieter a place is the more dangerous it becomes when once my whereabouts are known. To-morrow I must try a fresh move."

She had a hundred questions to ask, but they were already standing before the door of the dark, solemn house, and thoughts of the danger he still ran in the darkness made her impatient for him to return.

She cut short his renewed thanks to bid him good-bye, and he waited until the door of the dark house had closed noiselessly behind her.

Then he recrossed the road, with eyes alert and his hand on the revolver in his pocket. Now, as he crossed the moonlit road and the dark strip of garden, was the moment for his enemy to fire a successful shot if he had anything of courage or enterprise.

But the fellow was evidently a nervous coward, and had been frightened completely away, for the half-expected shot did not come.

"If he had half as much nerve as he has genius for tracking a fellow and arranging his plans, I should have been in the family vault now," he said to himself as he re-entered the inn safely.

Meanwhile Florence had crept into the dark hall of Minerva House feeling involuntarily like a criminal as the oppressive silence reminded her abruptly how necessary it was that she should make no sound. Her heart beat more quickly as she realised how difficult it would be to give her suspicious employer any explanation of her adventure that would sound satisfactory and credible.

The stairs creaked as she reached them, and she crept upwards more timidly. Then her heart seemed to stop beating altogether; for at the top of the stairs had appeared a candle illuminating the severe face of Mrs. Morgan Wright, a picture of virtuous indignation framed in frills.

"And pray what explanation have you to offer of this, Miss Courthorpe?" she asked icily, and Florence knew from the tone that the explanation would never be believed.

(The unhappy consequences of Florence's night adventure will be told in next Tuesday's issue.)

THE LOVE STORY OF A COWARD.

An Act of Heroism which Brought a Wife.

From my earliest childhood I had been burdened by one great misfortune. I was born a coward. When the other small boys climbed the rafters of the old barn, ran across the beams and did their many deeds of boyish daring, I sat uncomfortably on the steps of the corn-bin and begged them tearfully to come down. I was afraid to put my nose outside the door after nightfall, cried myself ill if left alone without a light, and, even in daytime, never walked alone without constantly turning my head in fear of ghosts, and all sorts of things.

More than anything else, dogs terrified me. I would run from the smallest yelping puppy, and shuddered and turned cold if a dog so much as passed by on the other side of the street. The wise old women of the neighbourhood nodded their heads at me and told each other in whispers how my mother had been frightened almost to death by a savage dog before I was born.

When I grew to be a young man, it was no better, although I concealed my fears in some measure. It seemed as bad as could be when I was fancy free, but it became infinitely worse when I fell in love. Alice was the most daring young woman in our town and a born hero-worshipper. She was something of a naturalist and had captured with her own fair hands a collection of snakes that made me faint even to think of. She had faced an angry bull in a field, had tamed unbroken horses, ridden colts without saddle or bridle, and done so many brave things that my heart sank at rehearsing them.

My case was hopeless, of course, but I loved her only the more madly. Whenever I went near her I suffered tortures, for her pet and constant attendant was a horrible, snapping, snarling little dog.

This vicious creature had an especial spite against me. From beginning to end of my calls at Alice's home, he would growl and snap at my legs, my hands and my face. But though he sent me into agonies of terror and the cold perspiration poured from my body in a clammy shower at the end of every visit, I could not bear to give up my chance of seeing her.

It was not long before she knew my story, as everybody in the town made haste to tell it to her. I think she pitied me and regarded my cowardice as not the act of a free moral agent. At any rate, she sent the dog away.

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Freed from the terror of his presence, I mustered courage to ask her the fateful question. She was very gentle with me, but she gave me no hope. Choosing her words as kindly as might be in her sweet womanliness, fearing to wound me and yet stinging the more by her very kindness, she let me know that she could never marry a man whom she did not consider a hero.

I went out from her door in the firm determination to do something heroic and win, perforce, my matchless lady. But before I had reached the gate, that miserable little cur rushed snapping and snarling at my heels, and I forgot even Alice in the vain attempt to keep from showing the fear I felt.

I lay long that night with staring eyes, trying to think of something brave that I could do. I thought of going into the army and mowing down whole companies with my single arm. It would not matter if I were killed if only Alice loved me. But the mere thought of blood turned me faint and I would jump at the sound of a fire-cracker, besides there was no particular war on just then. I turned over plan after plan, to find all alike unavailing.

At last I must have fallen asleep with my eyes wide open, and dreamt horrible dreams. I heard the roar of fire-engines and imagined that the whole world was burning up. From her burning home, Alice was stretching out her hands to me and calling for help. I rose in my dreams—did I say, before, that I am a sleep-walker—dressed, clambered from my window by means of a tree that grew beside it, and started for Alice's pretty home beside the church.

I do not know how much I saw and how much I dreamt. The streets were filled with people but I avoided them with the cunning of a dreamer. To my excited fancy every house seemed bursting with flames. Only the church stood cool and still.

I thought I saw Alice on its roof and I clambered up, holding by the lightning rod, by anything. She was not there, but seemed to be on the steeple. I struggled up it, slipping and sliding. I looked down upon Alice's dwelling wreathed in fire. The roof and upper windows were not yet touched but all the lower part was incircled by flame.

Alice was not on the steeple. She stood at a second-storey window, holding out her hands and calling to me again while the horrible red glow crept nearer and nearer. Someone had rested a long ladder against the side of the church. I lifted it with a strength that was not my own, balanced it with the mysterious power of the sleep-walker, swung it across the fiery chasm till the end reached Alice's window-sill, and ran across the tottering, sloping bridge as firmly as if it had been solid earth. By what seemed a miracle, it held till I reached the window, then fell tottering to the ground.

A puff of flame shot in after me. I seized Alice in my arms, bore her to the other window and crashed through the glass with my fists. The pain in my hands awoke me and——

The dream was true. I stood in Alice's room with the flames incircling the house. In my arms I held, not Alice, but the little, cringing white dog.

In sickening terror I looked down. The flames coloured the world blood-red. A great sea of fiery faces looked up at me. Beneath the window stood four men holding a blanket by the corners.

"Jump! Jump!" cried scores of voices. I flung down the dog. The roaring of flames filled my ears. I dared not jump. I tottered and fell.

A shock and a rebound. I had fallen unhurt upon the blanket. I do not know how I got home. Perhaps I fainted and was carried. My mind is not clear as to anything that happened until the next day, when I got a message from Alice.

I was bruised and burnt, but I must see her. With the help of a stick, I limped slowly to her temporary residence, the home of our nearest neighbour. She received me alone in the parlour. It was one of those parlours with a bright red and green carpet, protected by blue rugs. Across an ancient hair-cloth sofa was thrown a magenta slumbering robe crocheted in a wonderful pattern. Enlarged photographs, which slightly resembled each member of our neighbour's family, decorated the walls, along with pictures of the Royal Family. But, oh, what a Paradise it was with my darling in it, and how like an angel she looked in her white gown as she came forward to welcome me with a gladness that sent my heart fluttering like a bird in May.

I could not say a word. She poured forth thanks, praise and admiration, until I did not know myself. She thought I had dared to walk along the tottering ladder and enter the burning house to save her dog.

How could I tell her! How could I quench the light in her sweet eyes and banish the smile for which, coward as I was, I would have given my life many times? She thought me a hero. She was ready to be my wife.

If she could only believe it always. But she would find out. She would grow to despise me and unhappiness would embitter all her days. Better lose her now than plunge her into future misery.

I tried to speak, but I could not. How could I interrupt her when her words were so dear, so dear! At last I got to my feet.

"Alice," I said—I must have turned white, for she sprang forward as if to help me. "Alice, you are praising me for something I did not do. It was not I who climbed last night. I have a horrible fear of high places. I tremble even to climb the stairs, and I am terribly afraid of dogs. I would not go near one to save my life. It is all a mistake. I am not a hero, though Heaven only knows how I wish I were."

"But you did climb, George, and saved Muffet at the risk of your life?" she answered, bewildered. It was the first time she had ever called me by name.

"No, no," I cried, terror-stricken lest my courage should fail. "I was walking in my sleep. I should never have dared while awake. And I was dreaming that I was rescuing you. I would give the world to be the man you thought me, but I am not. I am a coward."

I staggered weakly for my hat and stick. I could not bear to look upon her face. I would remember it as I had last seen it, filled with love.

Dazed, I laid hold of the knob. My beloved came towards me. "George," she cried, in such a tone that I could not but turn back. She came straight to my side. "I think you are the bravest man I ever knew," she whispered. I dared not speak. I thought I was dreaming again and that a word would break the spell. I must have tottered and almost fallen, for she put her arms round me and led me to the sofa. Then she slipped down and knelt beside me.

Her lips were very near to mine. "Am I dreaming again?" I asked doubtfully. There was no mistake. It was surely a kiss upon my forehead. Then the queenly head went down and her face was hidden in her hands.

"No, no!" she cried, "you are awake—and I love you."

* * * * * *

I have a great fondness for red and green carpets, blue rugs, and magenta draperies. I would like to furnish one room in our house with them, but my wife says that we possess the essence of joy and do not need the visible symbols.

B. E. Bush.

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The Story of the Week.

(See Coloured Cover.)

THAT CONSUMMATE VILLAIN.

Three Scenes in a Life.

"You will not listen to me? You will not let my love speak for itself? You refuse to marry me, though I worship the very ground your feet walk upon?"

"I am so sorry, Mr. Dallas, so dreadfully, dreadfully sorry if I hurt you, but, indeed, I cannot marry you. I do not love you."

He caught my hands in a grip that held them like a vice.

"No," he whispered, and to my strangely excited fancy his voice sounded like a hiss, "and shall I tell you why you do not love me? Shall I make it as clear to your heart as it is to mine why I have no chance—no chance with you at all?"

There was such anguish in the tone that I was smitten with compunction. I cannot bear hurting anything or anybody, much less could I bear to hurt my friend as Mr. Dallas had been.

"Shall I tell you?" he repeated.

I nodded my head, I could not speak.

"It is because my scapegrace cousin, Bertram, has wound himself into your heart!" he exclaimed fiercely. "It is because you have let him deceive you into thinking his inward man matches that beautiful face of his which I have heard fools say is like an angel's! Can you deny that Bertram——"

I tore my hands from his and drew myself up haughtily.

"You have no right to say such things to me," I cried, "even though we are old friends. How dare you insinuate that your cousin Bertram and I are more to one another than the merest——"

"Acquaintances," he sneered. "My dear Miss Merriman, am I blind, deaf, or imbecile? Bertram is clever. What am I that I should enter into the field against him?" His tones again grew terribly bitter. "As it is, he has all that I lack to commend him to a woman — looks, charm, intellect, and all; I have nothing."

There was a ring of such genuine pathos in his last words that again my heart melted towards him. How could I know, how could I ever guess that this man——

But I must tell my story straight on as it comes without looking forward into the future.

"I am sorry," I faltered once more; "one's heart is not always entirely under one's own control. I cannot love you, I cannot marry you!"

"Tell me the truth, then," he muttered, coming nearer to me, but not touching me again; "my great love for you gives me at least the right to hear truth from your lips; is it Bertram who stands in your way?"

Something compelling in his eyes forced me to answer him against my will.

"Yes," I whispered. "Why should I hide it? Why should I be ashamed? Bertram and I love one another. There is no love in my soul for any but for him."

By the dim light in the conservatory I saw the deadly pallor that overspread his face, his breathing came short and quick; no other sound was audible except that panting, hurried breath, and the drip of the fountain amongst the palms behind us, and from far away inside the house the soft notes of a waltz.

When my companion spoke again his voice was hoarse and low.

"Heaven forgive you," he said, "for throwing away my love for his. Some day you will know the truth about Bertram. Some day you will learn that his saint-like face does not hide a saint-like character. Some day you will know the gold from the dross!"

"Yours being the gold?" I cried.

"You will see!" he said significantly. "Only promise me one thing—one thing," he repeated, and his hands took mine again and wrung them hard.

"What is it?" I faltered, afraid because of the gleam in his eyes, and the stern set of his lips.

"Promise me that if you find you are mistaken in your estimate of Bertram—if you discover that, after all, I am right, you wrong, and he is truly more devil than angel, promise that then you will listen to me, the lover who loves you with a love beside which Bertram's love is as water to wine? Promise me that."

"How can I? How can I?" I said. "I love Bertram—I trust him; his is no surface goodness and no watery love. I love him! I am not ashamed——"

"*But you will be ashamed*"—a deadly significant ring in his tones—"mark my words, Miss Merriman. I know my cousin better than you know him. I have known him for many a long day. Mark my words, Bertram will shame you yet. When that day comes remember I shall still be your friend. Promise you will let me plead my cause again—*when Bertram fails you?*"

"He will never fail me," I answered proudly.

A harsh laugh rang through the conservatory. Mr. Dallas' eyes looked into mine, a mocking smile in their depths.

"You will see," he said. "I do not speak in ignorance. Keep your faith whilst you can. When it dies—remember Hubert Dallas loves you, loves you, loves you!"

His voice sank to a passionate whisper; he caught me in his arms and strained me to him for an instant, murmuring in my ear:

"Is love like mine to go for nothing? I swear you shall be mine, you shall be mine some day—by fair means or foul."

The words came through his clenched teeth, his eyes blazed into mine, his face was white with passion. "You madden me with your lovely face!"

I struggled wildly in his arms, and at last he loosed me.

"Bertram the saint will fail you—you will be mine some day," he said.

Then I covered my face with my hands and fled from the conservatory; shame and deadly anger and a deadly fear for which I could not account setting my heart beating wildly in great throbs of terror.

Why did that new, strange fear grip at my heart, and what did it mean? Escaping upstairs by a back way to avoid the crowd of dancers in the ball-room and the hall, I locked myself into my room, and panting, breathless, miserable, flung myself down upon a couch to try and think.

I saw as in a vivid picture the faces of the two men who loved me—Hubert Dallas, and his cousin Bertram Henderson—and I shuddered as I remembered the ominous words to which I had just listened.

Why, oh, why, did Mr. Dallas repeat and repeat again that Bertram was unworthy of my love? Was it a lover's jealousy that made him wish to blacken his cousin in my eyes—or was it—could it be truth? No! a thousand times no! I reflected, rising impetuously to my feet and pacing the room with restless, fevered steps.

Bertram, a double-faced ruffian as his cousin would have me believe? Bertram, anything but a noble, honourable, Christian gentleman? It was absurd, ridiculous, and I laughed aloud, recalling my lover's fair face and clear eyes, and broad, open brow, and candid smile. And yet Dallas

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had always been my good friend and my father's friend; kindly, gentle, chivalrous to me and mine; why should I distrust his words? My soul was torn with doubts; and the words of Hubert Dallas swung to and fro in my mind with an ominous significance that filled me with dismay.

Yet I could not stay upstairs alone, I should be missed from the gay scene below. I must return to the ball-room, or my aunt and cousin would wonder what had become of me.

Removing as well as I could the traces of emotion from my face, brushing back the hair, I stood for an instant before my glass looking silently at my own reflection.

"Is it," I whispered very low, "is it good for a woman to have so fatal a gift as beauty? Why does he say I madden him with my lovely face? I only want him as a friend. Bertram is my lover. I am glad to be beautiful for him; I want to madden no other man."

Then I smiled at the vision of myself in the long glass—glad of my loveliness for Bertram's sake; and, if the glass told me true, it was not silly vanity to dream myself beautiful. Though my face was still white after the storm I had just passed through, nothing could spoil its lovely outlines, nor the curve of my lips that Bertram said was like Cupid's bow itself; my eyes, deep and blue as sapphires, shone like twin stars; and my hair—the glory of my hair gleamed with the burnished gleam of copper under the electric light.

I wore white, a trailing satin gown, not even its whiteness could rival the shining snow of my throat and neck, on which a diamond star that was my uncle's latest gift to me glistened and sparkled.

I smiled again, and nodded at my smiling face, some of my confidence restored to me.

"Hubert Dallas is only jealous," I said softly; "he told me my face maddened him. Bertram is true and good. My faith in him will never die. Hubert Dallas is mistaken—and yet——"

Then I switched off the light and went slowly downstairs to mingle once more amongst the gay throng.

My uncle, Mr. Merriman, was a banker, a millionaire, men said, and I, his orphaned niece, lived with him and his family in their beautiful Grosvenor Square house, treated by them all as one of themselves; made a petted daughter of by uncle and aunt, cherished as a sister by my cousins, my lot, indeed, was a happy one, and only a few weeks ago the crown of my joy had come when I learnt that Bertram Henderson loved me. Bertram and his cousin Hubert Dallas were both in good positions in my uncle's bank, and were both friends of the Merriman family, and, alas, both men loved me!

But it was Bertram whom I loved. Bertram, whose beautiful face Hubert scoffingly likened to an angel's; Bertram, of whom he had spoken so ominously; whilst Hubert, I knew, was my uncle's favourite.

Over and over again uncle John had told me how he had trusted and respected Mr. Dallas; what powers he had left in his hands; how highly he thought of him.

But it was Bertram I loved, though Hubert and I were always good friends. I knew he was a good man, because uncle John was perpetually telling me so; yet he had sown seeds of doubt in my heart about Bertram, and try as I would I could not quite shake them off, the more so that Bertram never came to the ball, though I watched and longed for him till daylight crept in and dimmed the light of the electric lamps and showed us that the banks of flowers in the great rooms were faded and dead.

And the next day the blow fell.

* * * * *

"To hang by the neck till you are dead, and may God have mercy on your soul!"

The court seemed to reel and grow dark before my eyes; the crowd of upturned faces ran together into one great blur, excepting that one face that stood out upon the darkness, white, stony, horror-stricken, the face of Bertram Henderson, my lover, the prisoner in the dock!

I think I stood up; I felt that I swayed, and that a hand went out and drew me gently back into my seat, and I heard a voice—it was Hubert Dallas' voice—say:

"We will get away in a minute; try to bear it a moment more."

I don't know why, but I wanted to laugh in his face, and then I longed to weep, but no sound came; and still I saw nothing save the white, stony face of the prisoner at the bar.

Then all at once a voice broke the silence. It was Bertram's voice, so changed, so ghastly, that I wanted to cry out to him to be silent.

"As there is a God above, I swear that I am innocent!" he said, and he looked all round the court; and suddenly the mist cleared from my eyes, and I saw the upturned faces fixed upon him, and on some I saw unbelief, on some horror, on some pity.

"I swear I am innocent!" he repeated, and then the mist swam before my eyes again. I held out my hands blindly, and it seemed to me that I fell into a great abyss of outer darkness.

When I woke from that long, long swoon I was safe in my bedroom, and for just one wild moment I tried to think that what I remembered was just a ghastly nightmare, from which presently I should awake.

But my cousins stole in, and their white faces and deep mourning reminded me it was no dream but a ghastly hideous fact; uncle John was dead—murdered, they said—and Bertram Henderson, the man I loved, was the murderer.

Lying there in the darkness all the facts came back to me, and whirled in my brain till they drove me nearly mad.

It had happened the day after the ball—the ball to which Bertram had not come; that fact had been used as evidence against him.

The morning after the ball my uncle went to the bank as usual, and Bertram was there, in his place, so also was Hubert Dallas.

During the course of the morning, so the testimony went, my uncle had sent for Bertram into his private room, and detained him there for some time. Many witnesses affirmed that when Bertram returned to his place he looked white and disturbed and very unlike himself.

No other clerk had been summoned to my uncle's room that morning, and nothing was seen of uncle John at lunch time, when it was his custom to pass through the bank, giving a nod and a smile to his subordinates.

Not until the bank closed did anyone enter that private room, and then the old doorkeeper, having knocked and received no answer, went softly in, thinking his master had passed out unobserved.

But uncle John sat there, still and silent, and his dear white head bent over his desk, his hands still holding the pen in its stiff fingers, but his kindly voice was hushed for ever; his eyes were closed in the sleep that knows no waking.

He had been struck from behind, a blow aimed well at a vital part, and death, the doctors said, must have been instantaneous and probably painless.

And beside his chair, a mute witness to the crime, lay a heavy, loaded stick, bearing along its side in silver letters the words "Bertram Henderson!"

During the time that intervened between my uncle's death and the trial an amazing series of frauds were brought to light; clever forgeries, ingenious doctoring of ledgers; skilful embezzlements; and though Bertram strenuously denied any knowledge of these things, his guilt was proved, and proved up to the hilt.

At least so it seemed to me, as it must have seemed to all men; and my heart grew sick and yet more sick, seeing that the words of Hubert Dallas were coming true!

Oh! but it was a bitter blow, an agony past recording, to know that the man I had loved and honoured above all living men was, after all, a thief, a forger, a

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murderer. My heart went near to breaking, those bitter days; but Hubert was good to me, gentle and thoughtful, and tender, never obtruding himself, always at hand if I needed him, never alluding to his words of warning about Bertram, but ever watchful over me.

Hubert implored me not to go to the trial, yet I went. I could not keep away, and throughout its course my eyes never seemed to leave Bertram's face, which, even in this supreme hour of his shame and disgrace, still looked like the face of an angel, pure, strong, and beautiful.

Over and over again he asserted his innocence; declaring that when he left his uncle John's private room on the morning of the murder my uncle had been perfectly well, declaring also that he had no knowledge whatsoever of how his stick had come to be in my uncle's room at all, and of the figures and embezzlements he swore he was absolutely innocent.

But the proofs seemed so plain, so deadly plain, what could any jury do but commit him, that was what everybody said, and, as they said, the verdict was a foregone conclusion.

After that awful last day of the trial I lay ill for weeks, raging in the delirium of brain fever, and when I woke again to a knowledge of the outside world they told me that influence of a powerful sort had been brought to bear upon the authorities, that a monster petition had been signed begging for mercy for Bertram, and finally that his sentence had been commuted to that of penal servitude for life.

* * * * *

A year had passed.

I stood in my bedroom of the great house in Grosvenor Square, looking at myself in the long glass as I had looked a year ago on the night of the ball which, so it seemed to me, had been the beginning of such a sea of troubles.

I had sent away my maid half an hour before, and had begged my cousins to leave me alone for a few minutes after they had put the finishing touches to my gown; and now I stood silently contemplating my own form decked out in its bridal array.

Yes, it was my wedding-gown that gleamed white and beautiful in the summer sunshine flooding the room, my wedding gown that lay billowing round me in graceful, heavy folds, my wedding veil that covered the shining glory of my hair, on which nestled a spray of orange blossoms held by a glistening diamond star. I was dressed for my wedding, and the whole thing seemed like a dream.

"You are as lovely as the day!" the bridgeroom had said to me triumphantly the previous evening, but his words had brought no joy to my heart, no answering leap to my pulse.

And now I was dressed for my wedding, and in a little while, such a little while, Hubert Dallas and I would be husband and wife; Bertram and the past must be forgotten.

I had yielded to Hubert's wishes. The old love was dead and buried. Bertram had gone out of my life, and the man who had been a faithful friend pleaded so hard with me that I yielded at last, though I told him that I had no love to give him.

And he answered with a smile of triumph.

"I have won you; I will win your love, once you are mine! I will win your love!" and something in his tones made me shudder, I know not why.

I turned from the glass when they called me to come, and, still feeling like a person in a dream, I went downstairs and into the carriage, to be whirled away to the church.

The building was packed from end to end, and I heard murmurs of admiration as I swept up the nave on my cousin's arm, but the faces of the congregation flashed round upon me, and I shivered and clung to the arm I held; for that flash brought back to me the memory of the crowded court, a blur of faces turned towards the white, still countenance of the prisoner at the bar.

I think I tottered a little as I reached Hubert's side. He took my hand and held it closely, and his eyes watched me closely.

"Mine at last!" he whispered.

I was only dimly conscious of all that was passing round me. I vaguely noticed that my cousins stood close round me, that the clergyman had an odd stutter in his voice, that the sun poured through a stained glass window above me, and made great stains of colour on my white gown, that Hubert's close clasp of my hand hurt me. I did not take in a single syllable of what the stuttering voice of the clergyman was saying, until he paused and spoke again more gravely, more solemnly, and I woke to a consciousness of these words: "Let him now speak, or else hereafter for evermore hold his peace."

A great silence followed these words; so utter a silence it seemed and so long that a nervous tension seized me, and I longed to cry out.

And then the stuttering voice was beginning again, when suddenly a great hubbub arose far down the church. There was a scuffling of feet, a storm of angry voices, a babel of sounds that grew and spread till it became almost deafening, and the clergyman's voice fell silent, and, looking up, I saw his eyes grow wide and round with horror.

A low scream burst from my cousin, who stood behind me; the clamour in the church grew and grew, and I turned my head to see.

And what I saw made my heart stand still for a moment, then rush on, till its beating nearly suffocated me, and I clutched the altar rail to keep myself from falling.

Hubert had turned, too; he staggered where he stood, and for a moment I thought he would have fallen; his face grew white as death, and he put out his hands as though to push away a grisly phantom of his brain.

But it was no phantom who stood on the chancel steps in front of the swaying crowd, who tried in vain to pull him back; no phantom that looked at Hubert with grave, accusing eyes, and at once with the sorrowful eyes of an avenging angel.

Bertram stood there! Bertram dressed in the mud-coloured dress of a convict, the broad arrow marking every garment he wore; Bertram whose voice said slowly and distinctly so that it penetrated all over the church and hushed the hubbub:

"I declare an impediment. That man is a murderer!"

His uplifted hand pointed at Hubert, his accusing eyes looked straight and square into those of my bridegroom, which shifted and fell under that steady gaze, and I saw a look of deadly terror sweep over Hubert's face even whilst he said huskily:

"It is a lie!"

The clamour was renewed afresh. Two constables pushed their way through the crowd, the clergyman turned from the altar, and went to the convict's side, but Hubert stood like one rooted to the spot, saying mechanically over and over again, "It is a lie! It is a lie!"

One of the constable's clasped a pair of handcuffs upon Bertram's hands, but he only smiled into the man's face and suffered the indignity unresistingly.

"The truth will out," he said, as they prepared to lead him away; "and, thank God, I have stopped this infamous marriage!"

Suddenly the icy band that had been about my heart for a year seemed to snap. I sprang to his side and laid my hand upon his arm.

"You were innocent!" I whispered. "You were innocent all the time!"

"All the time," he whispered sadly. "Why did you doubt me, sweetheart?"

And the icy band round my heart melted more and more, and before the gaping crowd, heedless of comment, heedless of aught but Bertram, I flung my arms round his neck and lifted my face to his, and said out loud that everyone might hear:

"Forgive me for doubting you—forgive me for everything. I love you—only you. I have loved you all the time!"

I felt his lips touch mine, and then I saw the constables force a way through the crowd again and lead Bertram away, and on the top of the chancel steps where he had stood I fell down like a stone and fainted dead away.

It was a long time before they dared to speak to me of that interrupted wedding, so terrible had been the shock to my

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nerves and brain; and when I rose from my second bed of sickness, weak as a child, scarcely able to walk, and feeling I had no strength to bear any further blows, I found that I had awakened to a great and wonderful joy.

Bertram was beside me, no longer in convict dress, but Bertram looking almost his old self again, excepting for his close cropped hair, and the stamp of suffering on his face.

What a strange, incredible story he had to tell; and what a terrible time he had been through, and by what miraculous ways had the truth become known.

Needless to say that Bertram was entirely innocent of the crime for which he had so nearly suffered the extreme penalty of the law.

The real criminal—and this to me is the most terrible part of the story—was Hubert Dallas, the man who had been my friend, the man I almost married, the man who had tried to blacken Bertram's character in my eyes.

He had said he would win me by fair means or foul, and finding fair means impossible, he had passed on to the dastardly attempt which was so nearly a successful one.

The truth was told to Bertram by a fellow convict, a man dying of consumption, who had been Hubert's accomplice, and who reached Princetown a few months after Bertram went there, to suffer the penalty of some other crime he had committed, though no suspicion that he was uncle John's murderer had ever fallen upon him.

Bertram had shown the man some trifling kindness, and he, smitten by remorse, confessed the truth—a truth he was only able to tell to Bertram in snatches and at long intervals when Bertram had occasionally been with the dying man in the infirmary of the prison.

It seemed that Hubert had become involved in monetary difficulties of a serious nature, and the forgeries at the bank had been his handiwork, as also the doctoring of the ledgers, which he had skilfully made to appear the work of poor Bertram.

Bertram's fellow convict had, in older and more prosperous times, been a friend of Hubert's, and having fallen on evil days, was a willing prey in his hands, and ready even to commit the most dastardly crime if money was the reward.

The very large sum offered him by Hubert tempted him to murder uncle John—an easier matter than had appeared possible at the trial.

He explained to Bertram that he had affected an entrance into my uncle's private room through a courtyard at the back of the house, and that having committed the crime he had managed to escape the way he came. My uncle's well-known habit of sitting with his window wide open confirmed the story.

Bertram's stick had been used at the instigation of Hubert, who had himself given it to the murderer.

The story had been told again by the dying convict in the presence of the governor and chaplain of the prison; but, meanwhile news had reached Bertram through a letter from his mother of my approaching marriage, and barely waiting for his order of release to be signed—not waiting to change the convict garb he wore—he had hastened with all the speed that trains and cabs would allow to stop the ceremony and prevent my being joined for life to an intentional if not an actual murderer.

Those handcuffs I had seen clasped upon Bertram's wrist were soon removed by the apologetic constables when the truth of his story was known and corroborated by the governor of the prison, whose letter he showed them; and his exit from the church was speedily followed by Hubert's exit also, safely in the custody of two other constables who had arrived close on the heels of the first pair bearing a warrant for his arrest.

But for Bertram's timely appearance upon the scene I might have been tied for life to as big a scoundrel as ever walked this earth.

Instead of this I am married to the man who has always seemed to me the best and noblest man in the world, save for a short time when my eyes were blinded, my judgment weakened, my faith shaken by the man who committed crimes to win me—Hubert Dallas, that consummate villain!

L. G. Moberly.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

October 14. — Those whose birthdays fall here will experience an unsettled time; give attention to business if success is desired.

Girls born in the early morning will have some strange experiences in love affairs.

The day is good for dealing with aged people, farmers, landlords, and coal merchants.

A child born here will be fond of travel; never settle long in one place. Will be cautious and reserved.

October 15.—An unfavourable birthday for health, business, and general affairs. Some criticism and private enmity.

Girls will need care with lovers; engagements are broken through quarrels.

The day is not good for speculating, love affairs, pleasure seeking, or engaging servants.

A child born to-day will be changeable, untidy, and never very fortunate.

October 16.—A fairly successful year for those in business; avoid law and rash actions.

Young girls meet with disappointment with opposite sex.

The day is good to buy and sell, to travel, and deal with electricians or new inventions.

A child born here will be fortunate and advance in life. Fond of change and travel; lack order and method.

October 17.—An unfortunate birthday; business, health, and domestic affairs need extra care.

Girls born near four a.m. have anxiety over love letters and through third parties.

The day is evil for most things; keep quiet and let others make the first move. Don't ask favours.

A child born here will be active and rash; will have a troubled and unfortunate career.

October 18.—An active year for those born on this date. Pay attention to business and don't speculate.

Girls will have a quiet time in love matters.

The day is good to write and travel; evil for speculation, buying, and selling.

A child born to-day will be rather unfortunate, though it will have a clever and active brain; should keep in the employ of others.

October 19.—The year will be one of much stir and movement. The mind will be rash and law can easily result.

Girls will have anxiety, and quarrel with lovers; finances and jealousy will be the cause of discord.

A child born this day will be rash and headstrong. Rather fortunate in its affairs. Not so good for a girl.

October 20.—A good year for business and general affairs, but a lot of worry and annoyance is indicated. Take care of health

Girls will find love affairs very interesting; they become engaged or marry.

The day is good for business, pleasure, and visiting. Unfavourable for writing and dealing with landlords or property.

A child born here will be generous, affectionate, and lucky. Should go in business for itself and do well.

Asturel.

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A TEST IN FLATTERY.

WHICH BROUGHT ABOUT A VERY UNEXPECTED RESULT.

"I MAINTAIN," said Bertha Sargent, "that a man is even more easily flattered than a woman."

"And I," returned her betrothed, "insist that you are wrong. Do you suppose that any sane man would be taken in by the exaggerated compliments which most women blissfully swallow?"

"I will concede," replied Bertha, "that flattery, to affect a man, must usually be coated with subtlety. But he will take it every time, whereas a woman sometimes knows better."

Frank Horton laughed in high amusement.

"Show me the man," he cried, "who cannot see through any form of flattery, no matter how artful!"

"Show me the man," retorted Bertha, "who is not invariably influenced by it, when the woman who flatters him is clever enough. Even you, Frank, are not exempt from that weakness. I'll wager that even now some designing woman could make you believe she liked you and wheedle you into paying her such attention as would satisfy her vanity."

Frank Horton inclined his head with exaggerated deference. "Thank you, Bertha, I see you have an exalted idea of your affianced husband."

"There's no use being offended, Frank; but that is my honest conviction, my actual belief concerning the genus man."

"And woman?" he queried coolly. "I presume you, for instance, would be absolutely invulnerable if any man endeavoured to flatter you into believing that he loved you better than I?"

"Why, Frank! Do you think I'd be so fickle in the first place as to allow him such an opportunity?"

It ended by their having a downright quarrel. Of course after it was all over and they had made it up, each was heartily ashamed of the affair.

It seemed inevitable that these two should wrangle whenever a question came up for discussion. This disastrous habit was growing upon them.

The chemical make-up of the two characters seemed to be such that the heat of a spirited argument never failed to cause combustion.

Friends and relatives of the pair prophesied an unhappy wedded life unless matters changed for the better.

During the next few days Bertha was busy making preparations to entertain a friend of her school days, who was coming to visit her.

Kate Richards was a bright, clever, companionable girl, but not pretty, according to accepted standards.

Bertha, musing over the old days and recalling Kate's tactful ways and quick understanding, had a sudden inspiration.

"Just the thing!" she cried, clapping her hands jubilantly in the privacy of her home.

After Kate's arrival she lost no time in revealing her brilliant plan. The friend hesitated at first, but her doubts and scruples were soon swept away by the force of Bertha's enthusiastic arguments.

"You know just how to manage it, Kate dear, and I do so want to prove to Frank that he is in the wrong! I am absolutely certain that he'll walk right into the trap. And, of course, I won't have any personal feeling about it, for I know you so well. If I were dealing with an unprincipled girl it would be different. But you are so true and reliable, Kate."

She might have added, "And so plain of face." Perhaps she did mentally.

When Frank Horton called the next evening, bringing his chum, Will Armstrong, to meet his *fiancée's* friend, Bertha managed, without making the matter too conspicuous, to give Kate and Frank an excellent opportunity for a *tête-à-tête*.

She herself took Will Armstrong in hand and endeavoured to console him for his presumable disappointment. If Armstrong was dissatisfied with the arrangement he certainly did not show it.

After that evening followed Bertha's informal dinner dance given in her friend's honour; then commenced a round of delightful affairs which promised to fill to overflowing the three weeks allotted to Kate's visit.

Bertha smiled triumphantly to herself to note the apparent success of her little scheme. Just as she had imagined, Kate's method of flattery had brought the expected result.

Horton was unmistakably attentive to the girl. There was no need now for further manœuvring. He voluntarily sought her side whenever occasion permitted.

Armstrong had become a frequent caller. The thought flashed upon Bertha one day that she was perhaps acting unpardonably rudely in keeping him and Kate from becoming better acquainted. No doubt he was desirous of a closer friendship with her. As hostess she should really have assisted in the affair, instead of arranging things to suit her own selfish desire for triumph over Frank.

The scheme had proceeded far enough, anyway. She had won.

Almost any day she might divulge the secret and have a good laugh at his expense. Wouldn't he be ashamed and confounded, though!

Meanwhile she tried to atone for her former rudeness by making the way for Armstrong to see more of Kate. To her astonishment, that young man showed no disposition to follow up his advantage.

"I believe you are trying to get rid of me, yourself," he accused her one day, when she made a particularly bold move to further her new purpose.

She gave him a quick look of astonishment. How strange his eyes looked! There was a warmth, a sweetness in them that she had never noticed before. And how handsome he was!

The revelation thrilled her. She understood, now. And the understanding did not displease her.

In talking with him further, she became thoroughly convinced of his superlative delicacy and consideration where an argument was concerned. He showed such respect for her opinions! Truly, to talk with him was a wonderful relief from the nerve-racking friction which always attended an earnest conversation with Frank Horton.

Her intention of taunting Horton with the success of her test was forgotten in the exhilaration of this new experience. There was no denying Will Armstrong's influence over her.

She resolved to be honest with her affianced.

(Concluded at foot of next page.)

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SERIAL STORY COMPETITION.

STILL ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO WIN ONE OF THE TEN HANDSOME GRAMOPHONES OFFERED.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

The picture on this page illustrates a certain sentence in this week's instalment of our powerful new serial "A Foe in the Family." All you have to do is to read the instalment carefully, and to write under the picture the sentence which you think is illustrated by the sketch. Ten splendid Gramophones will be awarded to readers whose correct solutions are posted to us soonest after the publication of this number of *Short Stories*.

Sentence:	*Page* .....
....	*Column* .....
....	*Line* .....

In order that all competitors shall have an equal chance of winning these handsome prizes, we have decided to distribute the Gramophones over the British Isles thus:

Two Gramophones will be won by readers living in the London postal district whose correct solutions are posted first.

Two Gramophones will be awarded to readers living within 100 miles of London.

Two to those English readers living over 100 miles from London.

Two to Scottish readers sending in correct solutions and two to those living in Ireland.

When you have found the sentence write it down in the space below the picture, together with the number of the page, the column, and the line. Then put your name and address in the space provided, cut out this page and post it to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Mark your envelope in the *top left corner* with the name of your postal town, and the time of posting, thus:

MANCHESTER.
2.45 p.m.

Then post it *at once*.

Name..... Address.....

Frank listened calmly to the bravely delivered account. Then a strange gleam broke over his face.

"Bertha," he said quietly, "don't you think you walked into the trap very readily?"

"Trap? What trap?" Amazed, astounded, she stood gasping before him. Then came a flash of understanding. "How dared you! Oh, how dared you!" she cried.

"You pursued the same plan with me," rejoined Horton, smiling. "Did you think I could not see through your purpose when you arranged for Kate and me to be thrown so constantly together?"

Bertha was silent.

"However," resumed Frank, "the manœuvre resulted differently than either one of us anticipated. I have really learned to love Kate, and now that you have given me my freedom I shall ask her to marry me. Will Armstrong has confessed to me his feeling for you, so I was prepared for your story."

After all, Bertha felt that she could afford to be magnanimous.

"You and Kate will make such a delightful pair," she said. "I know you will be happy. And we'll all of us be friends, won't we, Frank?"

"Oh, most assuredly," answered Horton, "for we each helped the other to find happiness."

Angela Morgan.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. FRANCES NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA HAMILTON .	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.
CASELLIS	A man from Jamaica who knows Mrs. Norton's past history.

Frances Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia Hamilton: Her companion.

NEW READERS START HERE.

HAVING arrived in England from a Bruges convent to be companion to my cousin, Frances Norton, I soon discovered that my cousin was taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money were lost and won. The climax came one night when Mary Vernon staked her diamond earrings (a gift from Lord Kinross), and one of the onlookers found them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton.

A few weeks later, my cousin stole a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew, an American millionaire, at the Café Regal.

We next moved into a house in Pont Street, where Sir John Strickland proposed to Frankie, and was refused.

Later on Lord Kinross called at Pont Street for a private interview, during which Percival Hope entered the room unannounced, and made the startling statement that Mary Vernon had discovered the thief who stole her diamonds, and that in a fortnight's time he would prove that Frankie was an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends.

The next evening Lady Gaveston, Frankie's chaperon, informed her that she didn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decided at once either to marry or refuse him, she would return to Scotland.

We went to the Derby, lost heavily, and to pay our debts, Frankie prevailed upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000.

That same night, at the Duchess of Warminster's ball, my cousin came face to face with Casellis, a man from Jamaica, who knew all about her past life. Percival Hope brought him in. It was a critical moment, but once again Frankie scored, for she bought his silence.

The next day marked the end of the fortnight, during which Hope was to obtain proofs of Frankie's guilt. Owing, however, to Frankie's ingenuity, the indictment failed miserably. Kinross then formally asked Frankie to be his wife. They were still in conversation when Sir John Strickland arrived. He had not heard of Frankie's engagement.

Before I could stop him he had gone into the room where my cousin and Kinross were talking. At sight of them he staggered and fell. Doctors pronounced it to be a paralytic seizure.

Frankie being in a desperate strait, then got a large sum of money by worming a state secret out of Dollie Grendale, the wife of an M.P., and selling it to Pettigrew.

Frankie's next adventure was to drug an American billiard player, whose opponent she had backed heavily. When alone, she was accused by Pettigrew, who swore to condemn her before the whole world. She secured his silence by managing to be found in his embrace by Lord Chesterton.

My cousin at this time met a Hungarian *attaché*, and fell violently in love with him. One day Lord Kinross called, and Frankie was nowhere to be found. Fearing she contemplated eloping with the *attaché*, Lady Gaveston determined to find her. Together we drove to his flat and found Frankie just ready to leave with him for the Continent. As she would not yield to our pleading, Lady Gaveston made the astonishing statement that the *attaché* already had a wife. He confessed, and, mad with wounded pride, Frankie stabbed him. He was taken to the hospital, but the doctor, guessing the truth, one day called upon us.

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THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

My cousin made no haste to see Doctor Musgrave, but lengthened out her dinner for quite half-an-hour. She spoke but little; gaiety had left her, her eyes, grown suddenly dark, half frightened me, and her mouth looked hard.

"Come with me, Cynthia," she said at last. She turned as she reached the door, and glanced back with a hurried yet wistful look at the room whose every detail bore the impress of her taste—the silver flagons on the mantlepiece, the quaint blue bowl upon the sideboard, the sketches on the wall.

"I sold them all," she said between her teeth, "but I did it to pay my debts—not to pay blackmail. He shall not have the money."

She swept into the drawing-room, and I followed her.

Doctor Musgrave greeted my cousin with effusion.

"He was delighted to see her looking so well. Better than he had dared to hope she would be after—after the distressing events she had passed through." This with a suave smile, but a cold look in his eyes that somehow made me think of a snake.

"Thank you, I am very well," said Frankie. "It is quite charming of you to feel anxious on my account. I could almost regret that I am in no need of your prescriptions."

The doctor bowed, and then, still more politely:

"You are too kind, Mrs. Norton, but I mustn't sail under false colours. I'm afraid I must confess my motive for calling on you was not wholly disinterested."

"No?" My cousin leant back on the lounge, arranging herself comfortably among the cushions, the picture of indolent luxury and ease.

"So long as you are here, Doctor Musgrave, the motive is really unimportant." Her eyes flashed as she spoke, she looked dangerous.

"You mustn't say that till you hear why I've come."

"If you insist," she laughed and offered him a cigarette.

"Thank you, but I rarely smoke."

"You *must*, or I shall have to put mine out. Just this once." She leant towards him, holding the dainty silver case at arm's length.

No one could withstand my cousin when she looked and spoke like that. Doctor Musgrave succumbed like the rest of his sex, he smiled and took the cigarette—but his eyes were still cold, and, I thought, crafty.

"I suppose you're leaving town shortly?" said Frankie. "Everyone who is anyone is ashamed to show their face in London during August."

"That," said the doctor judiciously, "depends."

"Your patients you mean? Of course, I was forgetting. But couldn't you get someone to take charge of your practice for a while. You want a holiday, you're looking tired and pale, almost haggard."

The doctor flushed. He was a vain man, and proud of his well-preserved looks.

"There would be no difficulty about my practice," he said stiffly. "I am kept in town on business."

"Yes? I thought it was only the stockbrokers, and people in the City, who had to worry over 'business,' I didn't know medical men had to do with those sort of things."

He smiled and stroked his fair moustache.

"I am not worried about the Stock Exchange, Mrs. Norton," he said slowly, "a much smaller affair engrosses my attention—I am interested, deeply interested in the welfare of poor sick children, and am anxious to found a home at the seaside where they can spend the first few weeks of convalescence after leaving hospital. But funds are scarce, and," he shrugged his shoulders, "subscriptions difficult to get, and——"

My cousin interrupted him with a bright smile.

"My dear man," she said, "why didn't you say so sooner? I'll give you a subscription with the greatest pleasure. I'm awfully fond of children, and I think it's sweet of you to want to give the poor mites a taste of the sea. What shall it be, doctor?" She rose and walked to her *escritoire*.

"Fifty pounds?"

She glanced at him over her shoulder, her face flushed with interest or excitement. I could see she felt relieved at the turn matters had taken. There was nothing to fear in a request for a donation to a children's seaside home!

The next moment I had reason to alter my opinion.

Doctor Musgrave leant back in his chair and stared gravely at the ceiling.

"Fifty pounds is but a drop in the ocean, Mrs. Norton," he said slowly. "The exigencies of the case require a far, far larger sum. The Children's Home will require £2,000 at least!"

My cousin turned round with a sigh and a shake of the head.

"How I wish I were a millionaire," she said. "Your home should want for nothing! As it is, I'm afraid I can't do much. You see, it's quite too late for a bazaar or even a fancy fair. If I'd known sooner I could have arranged a *fête* or something of the kind, and got the money easily. But now," she shook her head, and seemed quite sorrowful.

"I, too, despair of the bazaar, Mrs. Norton, also the fancy fair. But," he smiled, "I have faith in you."

"I simply haven't a suggestion! When I return to town I might be able to think of something that will help you, but not till then, I am afraid."

"You will not return, I presume, until after your marriage with Lord Kinross?"

"Yes. We shall go abroad for a month or two, until the beginning of December, I expect."

"Ah! I'm afraid the Home can't wait till then. It is imperative the money should be raised"—he paused, and for the first time during the interview seemed irresolute. "It must be raised before your marriage, Mrs. Norton," he said quickly.

"I'm afraid I don't understand you."

"If you insist on it I will explain more fully. But"—he glanced towards me—"it would, I think, be more discreet if you did not press for an explanation."

"My dear man," said Frankie airily, "you speak in riddles. Why should I give you or your hospital £2,000?"

"You are known to be charitable," he answered with a sneering little smile. "But if you cannot see your way to help the institution I must carry my petition elsewhere. Lord Kinross, I am sure, would not refuse me."

"Lord Kinross gives me his list of charities to revise," she answered. "I'm afraid I could not countenance so large a gift."

The doctor bowed.

"His cousin perhaps would be more generous? Do you think Mr. Hope would refuse me?" Frankie caught her breath, and for a moment made no answer. Hitherto I felt she had made sure of victory, now she began to doubt her strength. Doctor Musgrave was clever, resourceful, a man of infinite tact and self-control. Throughout the interview not a word had escaped him that could be used to his discredit. He had asked for a subscription,

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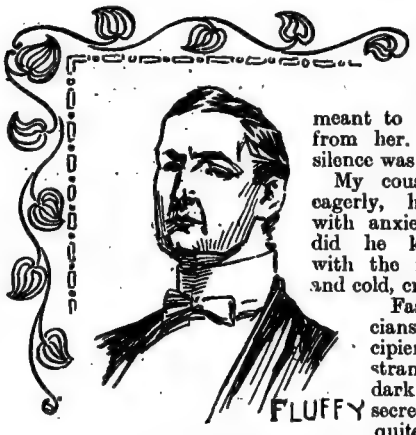

a large one truly, but there was nothing discreditable in that. And yet he meant to get the money from her. His price for silence was £2,000!

My cousin studied him eagerly, her figure tense with anxiety. How much did he know—this man with the inscrutable smile and cold, cruel eyes?

Fashionable physicians are the recipients of many and strange confidences, dark and curious secrets. It seemed quite impossible to fathom the man or the amount of his knowledge!

"I'm quite sure Mr. Hope would help you," she said at last, "especially if Lady Gaveston approved of the project. Both Lord Kinross and his cousin think a great deal of what she says."

"I don't think I should want Lady Gaveston's co-operation with Mr. Hope," said the doctor slowly. "He'd take my word—about the Home."

Frankie smiled at the words, a sudden, radiant smile Perhaps she remembered, as I did, that whatever Hope might know against her, Kinross would pay no attention to his accusations. On that afternoon when Percival's witnesses one after the other had collapsed, Kinross had declared he would never again listen to a word against her. The doctor might go to Hope and welcome, so far as Frankie was concerned.

"Well," she said, "perhaps you're right. I believe Mr Hope rejoices in an independent mind. I'm sure I trust your home will succeed, Doctor Musgrave."

"Thank you, I have great confidence in it. Failing Mr. Hope I shall try another member of the family. Lady Paula—your future sister-in-law, Mrs. Norton—is truly generous. As her medical adviser, I feel sure I shall not appeal to her in vain; nor, if you will forgive my saying so, do I think her brother will put her express wish aside—even at your suggestion. I shall have that £2,000, Mrs. Norton, you may be sure of that."

He rose and gave signs of departure.

"I shall go and see Lord Kinross to-night," he said. "I am a little anxious about Lady Paula's chest, she is delicate. Can I—or—deliver any message?"

It was a critical moment; I waited anxiously for Frankie to reply. So much hung on her answer. If she remained firm and still refused to give Musgrave the cheque, he would go then and there to Kinross and tell his tale, how and when he had found Mrs. Norton in Von Essler's rooms. And then—farewell, even at the eleventh hour, to the marriage she had risked so much to bring about.

On the other hand, two thousand pounds would buy the doctor's silence, but if she paid him she would still remain involved in debt. That, and the contempt, the fury, which the man roused in her, held my cousin back.

"Am I to go, Mrs. Norton?" he said, watching her face.

For a moment I thought my cousin would almost strike him. Her breath came in short, hard gasps, she shook with a passion that only her will could hold in leash.

Then with a sudden gesture she waved the man aside and went to her desk.

"Here's your hush money," she said contemptuously, handing him a cheque. "You earn a larger income as a blackmailer than a doctor, I make no doubt. I have paid you your price this once. I have given you two thousand pounds on behalf of the Home for Sick Children. But"—and she smiled maliciously—"if you ever again ask me for a penny, ever again dare to threaten or blackmail me, I shall demand an account of that Home. I shall ask what you have done with my subscription. You understand?"

"Perfectly, madam. You are clearness and courtesy itself."

He was not in the least perturbed, smiling and suave at the end as at the beginning of the interview.

He bowed to Frankie and to me, and was about to leave with the honours of war when there came a ring at the bell that set my heart beating twenty to the dozen.

"Wait," I said impetuously. "Wait. Lord Chesterton is here. I shall fetch him and tell him about you," and I glanced defiantly at the doctor.

"Don't be silly, Cynthia," cried my cousin. "You'll make matters worse."

As she spoke she slipped past me and out of the door. As the door shut the doctor clasped me by the wrist and forced me over to the window.

"Do you know what will happen if you tell Chesterton—big idiot that he is—of what has occurred here to-night?"

"Yes," I returned indignantly, "he'll throw you out of the house at once."

"Pray what good would that do? Silly child, such a scene would only disgrace him and your cousin, not me. Besides I should have something to say as well as you. I should tell Chesterton what happened in Von Essler's rooms, tell him that you—yes, you—took up a knife and stabbed the Hungarian. The motive? Jealousy perhaps. Not the truth?" as I indignantly denied it. "Tush, you cannot prove it. Your cousin is not likely to clear you at her own expense. Now, now will you call Lord Chesterton?"

His eyes burnt into mine, his fingers tightened on my wrist.

"Consider, Von Essler is not yet out of danger, even now he may die. And you may be charged with his death."

In a paroxysm of terror I fell on my knees, too frightened even to scream. I could not think clearly, nor reason properly, I could only remember that if this man fulfilled his threat and told Jack that I had stabbed Von Essler, honour to Frankie must keep me silent. And he, Jack, would believe.

"You won't say it," I gasped, "you won't——"

The man's face changed. He looked at me curiously, as though he really believed I had done what he accused me of. He drew in his breath and a smile, his hateful smile, came back to his lips.

"I will say nothing to-night," he returned gravely. "Get up and sit down quietly. That is better. Now," he gazed at me narrowly, "you must be sensible and do as I tell you. You're nervous and excited, you'd better go to bed, and I'll send you a soothing draught. To-morrow"—he paused—"to-morrow I shall come and see you, and we'll discuss the matter thoroughly. Meantime, keep as quiet as you can. Good-bye."

He bowed himself out, leaving me crouched on a chair.

The horror of it, the horror of it!

Again and yet again I'd been the scapegoat not of my cousin—*that* I could never believe—but of circumstances.

Pettigrew's missing pocket-book, Pettigrew's stolen notes, both had found their way into my possession, and had helped to estrange me from Percival Hope. And now that this other, and I felt strange interest had come into my life, now that I had learnt to care for Jack, the same dark shadow fell over me. The shadow of unjust and cruel suspicion.

My cousin entered the room abruptly. "Has he gone?" she said.

I nodded.

She sat down beside me, and laughed in a jarring, mirthless sort of fashion.

"My dream of a calm future with no unpaid bills to worry me, or spectres to haunt me, hasn't lasted long," she said. "It's a difficult matter to run straight, Cynthia, once"—she paused—"once you've done the other thing. I was a fool to sell my furniture," she added fiercely, "a fool to listen to Lady Gaveston. I've left myself without a home, for what? To satisfy that man's rapacity."

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Can't you pay any of your bills, Frankie?" I urged. I so longed for my cousin to get free of debt that I roused myself to discuss the possibility.

"No," she shook her head, "not one. I'm going to stick to my last thousand. I'll not be left without a penny."

"I wish you could pay them, Frankie," I sighed. "I'd do anything to get you the money."

"Well," she glanced at me quickly, "if that's so, you might do more than wish! Chesterton's in the morning room. Ask him for three thousand pounds; he'd be delighted at the chance of lending it to you. You can pay it back after I'm married, you know. I shall have a good allowance."

I shook my head. "I could not, Frankie, after—after what that dreadful man said to me just now."

"Do you mean Musgrave?"

"Yes."

"What's he been saying, or rather threatening? He surely didn't try to get any money out of you."

"Worse than that. He—threatened to tell Chesterton it was I who stabbed Von Essler. Frankie, if he does I can't say anything. I wouldn't give you away for all the world. But"—I laid my head on her shoulder, and, having nothing better to do, began to cry.

"Didn't you tell the doctor the rights of the affair?"

"No."

My cousin made no answer, but suddenly caught me to her and kissed me hard.

"Don't fret, Cynthia," she said softly, "whatever happens, Chesterton shan't think anything but what is true about you. I haven't always been fair and square to you, I know, but this time you shan't suffer the least little bit. I will explain everything that may seem strange to Chesterton about you. When the time comes I will speak out."

I remembered that promise later. So did she!

"You'll ask him for the money, dear?" she said, after a while.

"Yes, I'll go now."

"You're a good child. Does it ever strike you, Cynthia, as a strange thing that what has taken me such time, trouble, and—and other things to reach, you should have gained without any effort at all? Look," she pulled me in front of the glass, so that we faced the mirror side by side, "we make a charming pair, Cynthia, and we're different as night from morning. Yet we're both engaged, you to Chesterton—don't be silly, child, it's nonsense to deny it—I to Kinross; men of wealth and title. You're pretty and ingenuous. I'm something more than pretty," she glanced at her lovely face and perfect figure, "and I've more brains in my little finger than you have in your flaxen head. And yet you are beginning where I leave off. It's strange, and it's not altogether fair. It's easy, of course, to point a moral, and declare that innocence unaided has accomplished what I found so difficult to do. But that's all nonsense. If it hadn't been for me you'd have stayed at the convent all the days of your life, teaching and sewing from cock-crow till sunset. Whereas I broke away from a life of drudgery by sheer strength of will. You would never have had the courage to do as I've done, Cynthia."

"I know I owe everything to you," I whispered, feeling vaguely reproached.

"Get the money from Chesterton, and I'll give you a receipt in full," she laughed with a sudden change of manner. "Hurry!"

I went swiftly towards Frankie's den, picturesque in its medley of rose-coloured draperies, soft-cushioned chairs, and its quaint array of shoes. Strangely enough, I had no doubt or hesitation as to what I was about to do. Had it been Percival Hope I was going to ask, I should have been weighed down by the thought of those searching eyes, that firm, hard mouth, the suspicion that it seemed to me lay ever in his smile. But in the case of Lord Chesterton it was quite different. Frankie had assured me that she would never let him think ill of me. I had no cause to fear.

I went straight up to him, and without any preliminaries asked abruptly:

"Will you please lend me three thousand pounds for six weeks? I can pay it back then."

He laughed in an amused sort of fashion.

"Six weeks or six years, if you want it Cynthia. What is it—bets?" and he smiled provokingly.

"You know I never bet," I answered flushing. "It's, it's — bills. Dressmakers' and milliners', you know."

"Bills? For £3,000! You're a transparent baby, Cynthia; as if anyone would give you credit for such a sum. A little girl like you," and he tried to slip his arm round my waist. I suppose he meant to be paternal!

"I don't want to tell you whose bills they are," I said gravely, "they may be mine or Lady Gaveston's, or"—I paused—"Mrs. Curtis Blount's. Anyway they've got to be settled. The money is only wanted for six weeks," I continued. "Can you trust me to repay you?"

I don't think it's necessary to state exactly what he said. Some things should be left to the imagination. Anyway, he left shortly after in great contentment, and I returned to Frankie with the promised cheque. Once again she had triumphantly surmounted a threatened danger—turned a defeat into a victory.

Next morning Dr. Musgrave made his promised call. I think he was surprised, though hardly pleased, at the result of the interview.

"Thank you," I said quietly in answer to his kind inquiries, "I am all right to-day, quite recovered, in fact. By-the-bye, if you have anything you want to tell Lord Chesterton, you'd better see him this morning. He's leaving for Cowes this afternoon. This"—I produced a card—"is his address. I've nothing more to say, Dr. Musgrave. You can tell Lord Chesterton anything you like—and—good-morning." I left the room breathless, but with dignity. The doctor, thinking discretion the best, if not the only card to play, departed silently.

That afternoon we said "Good-bye" to Pont Street. In but a few hours the house that had been our home for the past six months, where every room was reminiscent of a chapter in my cousin's life, in but a few hours, I say, it would be empty, desolate! Stripped of its gods, desecrated by the unholy fingers of a dealer in furniture!

Once again Mrs. Ponsonby would instal her horsehair chairs, her mahogany tables, and early Victorian sofas. Once again Sir John would cross the threshold of the house that had brought him so much ill, carried helpless as a child through the rooms, where he had waited in the flush of a strong and vigorous manhood for the woman he had loved more dearly than all else.

Tears filled my eyes as I passed down the stairs, looking a last farewell in every nook and corner.

Only a short time truly since I came there, but how much had happened in that time!

Frankie was waiting impatiently in the hall.

"Sentimental as ever," she said. "Cynthia, you're a goose!"

We got down to Southampton at half past six, Kinross and Chesterton, who had arrived by an earlier train, met us at the station, and we had dinner together at the hotel.

About eight o'clock we went down to inspect the yacht—

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Hartland's latest and most expensive craze. She looked like a picture in the clear moonlight, her white sails like pinions unfurled in the breeze!

We were to cross to the island that evening and join the rest of the party at Mrs. Venables' house in Cowes.

I enjoyed the trip immensely; the twinkling lights across the Solent, the gentle swishing of the sea upon the distant shore, the breaking of the surf against the rocks, the churning of the water as the yacht sped on its course, gave me a sense of rest and quiet. Here, on the eternal sea, the life of the teeming city seemed very far away, a thing of fret and worry, without end or purpose.

Mrs. Venables' reception, however, speedily dispersed the sense of quiet. She was a little woman of overpowering activity. Wanting no rest herself, she denied her guests the right to wish for any, and stirred them up to tennis, yachting, to go for a picnic or a drive at weird hours of the day and night.

My old friend, the pink youth, was there, also the faithful Algy, and Mrs. Curtis Blount was expected shortly! I wasn't best pleased at the intelligence and was very dignified with Chesterton in consequence, until he assured me that if there was a woman for whom he felt a cordial detestation, it was Vi! Then I felt sorry for her, but pleased with him.

The time passed very pleasantly, enlivened by "games" of the pink youth's invention, puerile but harmless. Kinross won a cup at the regatta, which he handed with great joy and pride to Frankie.

They were a most devoted couple in those days.

Frankie laid aside her coquetry and had eyes only for Hartland, while he grew more infatuated daily.

"Everything," as the pink youth remarked constantly and with great irrelevance, "was lovely!" It seemed as if Frankie had passed out of troubled waters, and could hope for a quiet and peaceful future.

The marriage was to take place at Cromer the second week in September, from the house of one of Hartland's aunts. It was arranged that we should spend a fortnight cruising round the coast in his lordship's yacht, and arrive at Cromer a week before the wedding.

The party was to consist of ourselves, dear Vi, Algy and Chesterton. Mrs. Venables was to come as a chaperon, and the pink youth was thrown in by way of ballast.

The evening before we were to start, Frankie and I went on board with Mrs. Venables to settle our belongings.

About half past nine Chesterton turned up and called us on deck.

"The post's just come," he explained. "I thought I'd bring you your letters. There's an important looking missive for Mrs. Norton marked 'Immediate'."

My cousin smiled her thanks and took the packet. She tore it open quickly and glanced hurriedly over the contents; as she read her face whitened and she grasped the rail as if for support.

Then thrusting the letter in her dress, she crossed over to Kinross.

"Hartland," she said, "I want you to do something for me." She linked her arm in his, and led him to the end of the boat. (I'm sorry, but to this day I can't tell the bow from the stern.)

I could not hear what she said, she seemed pleading for something, half in earnest, half in play. At last, with a quick glance round, she dropped a light kiss on his cheek.

"You can't refuse *now*," she cried.

"You're a witch," he returned, "and entirely unreasonable. But you shall have your way."

A minute later Frankie called me and Mrs. Venables to help her move a trunk in her cabin.

"It seems to me," observed that lady, when, after much exertion, we had put the box in place, "as if we'd slipped anchor. Positively"—she started to her feet—"I believe we're out at sea," and she ran up on deck in great excitement.

Frankie shut and bolted the cabin door.

"Mrs. Venables is right, Cynthia," she said, "we're off! We shan't put into port for three weeks—not till the day before my wedding."

"But the rest of the party——"

"What do they matter? Who wants Vi or Algy? As for gossip," she shrugged her shoulders, "Mrs. Venables is a sufficient chaperon, and love is a colourable explanation. People do mad things for love, don't they, Cynthia?"

"But you?" I exclaimed. "What's your reason, Frankie?"

For answer she gave me a letter—*the* letter.

"Read it," she said, "and you will understand."

"It's from Fluffy?" I asked, recognising the handwriting.

"Yes."

"But you've nothing to fear from him, he wouldn't do you any harm!"

"Read," she said impatiently. "Your questions madden me."

Trembling I drew near the lamp. For a while the words were blurred before me. Gradually, however, they grew plain—

"I have just returned to England," said the letter, "to learn that a marriage between you and Lord Kinross is arranged to take place in September. I tell you now, as I have told you many times before, you shall marry no one but me. You or I must tell this to Lord Kinross. Remember, if it is not you, it will be I."

I dropped the letter, and stared blankly in my cousin's face.

"What have you said to him in reply?" I gasped.

"Nothing—it is no use! Listen, I have still one chance. I must marry Kinross before Fluffy can see, or speak, or write to him. Fluffy could tell him things——" she paused. "If they see each other before the marriage I am lost," she cried; "after, he can do nothing."

"But how can you prevent their meeting?"

"I have persuaded Hartland to put off to-night instead of waiting for the rest. I shall persuade him to keep to sea till the last moment—the sea, where no letters can reach him, nobody find him. We shall not put into port until the day before our marriage. And then——" She broke off and stared at me with wide, unseeing eyes.

"I'll do it," she said, in a low, hoarse voice, lifting her hand as though to strike. "I'll do it. Nothing shall stop me now, not even——"

With a scream I rushed to her and forced my hand over her mouth.

"Don't say it," I shrieked, "you shall not say it."

She put me from her, and spoke no more until the morning. But all through the watches of that dreadful night, again and yet again, I heard the words—

"You or I must tell Lord Kinross. You or I——"

The yacht flew through the waters, my heart beat loud and fast. It was a race, a race between this man and Frankie. He to find Lord Kinross, she to hide him.

Who, who would win?

[This series of articles will conclude in two weeks' time, and will be followed by another series of equal interest entitled, "How I Chaperoned Belinda."]

"Doesn't your mother like me?" asked young Mr. Gilley in an effort to ascertain why Miss Keedick refused him. "Oh, yes, she likes you," was the reply of the maiden, "but she is already married to papa."

Uncle Joshua: "These city people have very polite manners, Maria." His Wife: "How so?" "Just let a couple of fellers have my watch, which they offered to regulate free gratis. They're to bring it back to me at the hotel."

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He Saved as Much.

"This talk about it being more expensive to live when married than when single is all rot," said Groomley. "Why, I've been married a year, and I save just as much as I used to." "And how much is that?" "Nothing."

Never too Late.

Miss Withers: "I'll never marry." Miss Prime: "Don't say that. Someone may leave you a fortune some day."

Where the Prompting Came from.

Hunker: "What prompted you to ask Miss Giddey to be your wife?" Spirits: "I think Miss Giddey herself prompted me more than anybody else."

But Mary Knew.

"Mary, did anyone call while I was out?" "Yes. Mr. Snooks." "Mr. Snooks—Snooks? I don't know anyone of that name." "Probably not, mum; he called to see me."

His Mission in Life.

"You are Mr. Quezeen, the husband of the celebrated lecturess on cookery, are you not?" "Yes, sir," replied the dejected, hollow-eyed man. "I am the man she tries her new dishes on."

Kissing Powder.

A very agreeable girl about twenty, having, during a country visit, run out of powder to whiten her face, has tried pounded sugar with the best results; she says it tastes nice when she is kissed.

The Benefit of the Doubt.

Emmeline: "Alfred, I am very fond of you, but I doubt if I love you well enough to be your wife." Alfred: "Emmeline, give me, oh, give me the benefit of the doubt." Emmeline: "I will, Alfred. Henceforth, all is over between us."

And Didn't Come again.

"Is your sister in?" "Yes, but she's sewing a button on a coat. You'll not see her yet awhile." "But it doesn't take long to sew a button on a coat." "It does when there's a man inside the coat." Hearing which, he went to call on his next girl.

Base Ingratitude.

Mr. Newhitch: "There, my dear, I've locked all the doors, turned off the gas, brought up the silver, and shut the hall window. Don't you think I'm an angel?" Mrs. Newhitch: "Well, I don't know; the butler used to do all those things at mamma's, and he was a fiend."

Why Harry Stayed out Late.

Middle-aged Matron: "And do you find married life as pleasant as you expected?" Young Wife: "Oh, it would be if it were not for the dog next door. He barks all the early part of the night and Henry is so nervous that he has to stay in town until two or three in the morning to escape the annoyance of hearing him."

And He Got it.

"I have had a delightful evening," he said, as he rose to go. "May I call again?" "I shall be glad to see you," she replied, with a blush. As he walked into the hall he saw in the mirror of the hat-rack a reflection of the roguish girl slyly throwing a kiss at him, and he turned back. "I must have that in the original package," he whispered. And he got it.

As He Wished it to be.

She: "You'd be the last man in the world I'd fall in love with?" He: "Well, that's all I ask. I don't want you to love anybody after me."

Very much Settled.

She: "Really, now, aren't you a married man?" He: "No, why?" She: "Oh, you have such a settled look." He: "Yes, I've been refused by thirteen girls."

Why he Left.

Miss Summit: "I was very much surprised, Mr. Jagway, to see you coming out of a public-house on Thursday afternoon." Jagway: "Yes; I had to catch a train."

Where Ignorance is Bliss.

He: "And did you see Monte Carlo whilst you were at Nice?" She: "No; papa called on him, I believe, but from his disappointed appearance when he returned to the hotel I think Mr. Carlo must have been out."

Couldn't Trust Herself.

Jenny: "Here comes Jack, auntie. I wish you would come down and stay in the room." Auntie: "Why?" Jenny: "I'm afraid he's going to propose, and I can't trust myself—he looks so poor and so handsome."

The Ways of Bachelors.

Proud Mother: "You haven't kissed the baby." Bachelor Uncle: "Um—er—I'll try to remember next time. I'll kiss her when I—er—come back from India." "When will that be?" "Let me see. About sixteen years."

Short Relationships.

"No, Mr. Jones, I cannot be your wife." "But you'll be a sister to me. Promise me that." "It is unnecessary. Your brother proposed to me last week, and I promised to be his sister. I have been your sister for a week."

Had to be Particular.

She: "It can hardly be questioned that every woman is more or less of a mind reader." He: "Do you think you could read mine?" She: "I'd rather not. Mamma is a little particular as to the character of my reading."

The Inconstant One.

A pretty girl, a winter night, a moon impassioned fellow, a gentle word, a solemn vow, a kiss— And all is well oh! Again the girl, another night, same moon— Thus far, 'tis well, oh! But if we took another look, we'd see— Another fellow!

Pa was Sarcastic.

Father (entering parlour at midnight): "Here is the jug, Ethel. You can get an extra half pint of milk when the man comes in the morning." Ethel: "Why, pa?" Father: "And get two extra rolls. I presume George over there likes them for breakfast."

Wanted Value for Money.

Wife: "Why are you smashing the works of your watch in that way?" Husband: "Well, I presume there's a grain of dust in the hairspring that makes it necessary for me to take it to the jeweller. He always charges me for rebuilding it throughout, and this time I intend him to earn his money."

A Week's Success.

Widow: "Do you think marriage is always a failure?" Bulfinch: "Always a failure! Well, I should say not. Why, I know a case where a wife fairly idolises her husband, and he—why, he can't keep away from her a minute." Widow: "Bless me, how long have they been married?" Bulfinch: "Nearly a week."

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A LADY OF RANK.

A Charming Little Tale of a Milliner's Bill.

If ever a man ought to have married money it was Charlie Lorrimer. Brought up in good style, the death of his father just before he, Charlie, came of age, revealed to him the unpleasant fact that instead of being in receipt of a good income, all that he had coming to him was a few hundreds a year; quite enough, of course, for many men to enjoy life comfortably upon, but not so to one who had been accustomed to have his every whim gratified without considering the cost.

Through influence, a post under Government was in due course obtained for him, and if he had been content to remain single, as hundreds of other young men similarly situated would have done, he could have been exceedingly comfortable, seeing that he had the *entrée* of some of the best society in town.

He was really an extremely good-looking young man, of undeniably pleasing manners; still, girls are more sensible, or more mercenary, whichever you like to call it, nowadays than they were formerly, and do not give their mothers and chaperons so much trouble in the way of forming undesirable attachments as they used to.

Hence it came about that as Charlie Lorrimer had the good sense not to pay marked attention to any young lady individually, in the particular set in which he moved, he was regarded as harmless enough. It is true there had been something between him and a certain Miss Diana Carew, a lady several years his senior, the daughter of a rich, fox-hunting baronet whose property adjoined the Lorrimers.

She was a lady who, if report spoke truly, was not only one of the best horsewomen in the county (a fact which was universally admitted on all sides), but just a wee bit fast as well; preferring to make her bets in coin of the realm rather than orthodox boxes of gloves, and not disdaining to take a hand at a card party where the smallness of the stakes was *not* a prominent feature.

Whether there had ever been more than a flirtation between them, or whether he or she were to blame, is a matter of uncertainty.

At any rate, before Charlie Lorrimer's bad luck came upon him, a coolness had sprung up between them, and Society was startled one day by the announcement that Miss Carew was engaged to Lord Duncombe, a middle-aged peer who did not enjoy the best of reputations.

In course of time they were duly married; the alliance, as people had predicted, proving anything but a happy one for the lady, her spouse speedily dissipating her ample fortune, and finally, finding England too hot for him, betaking himself somewhere abroad.

Possibly it was from being unsuccessful in his first effort that made people set Mr. Lorrimer down as a confirmed bachelor, but to everybody's surprise, he quietly announced one day, when he had just entered his twenty-eighth year, and ought to have known better, as his friends said, that he was going to get married; and, what was in their eyes still more discreditable, to a girl without a penny—a clergyman's daughter from a remote parish down in the west of England.

His friends could not help admiring his choice, a handsome specimen of English girlhood; but so for the matter of that was Miss Bungleigh, the rich brewer's daughter, who had unmistakably set her cap at him, and would have jumped at the chance of marrying him, and brought him a fortune into the bargain.

In due course the wedding came off, very quietly, down in Devonshire, and the happy couple, after the usual Continental honeymoon, set up housekeeping in a very pretty flat in West Kensington.

For a time all went well; he was not continually going to his club, and she, charmed with the novelty of life in London, after the dull quiet of the country, was perfectly happy and contented; but after a while the desire seized her to extend their somewhat small circle of acquaintances, and she began to rally her husband on not taking her about more, and introducing her into the set in which he had moved before they were married.

At the same time she had by degrees developed a somewhat expensive taste in the matter of dress, and her milliner's bills had more than once given her husband a severe shock, indeed he had hinted as much to her on one or two occasions.

Things had been going on in this way for upwards of a twelvemonth, and a certain amount of estrangement had grown up between them. The sweet, girlish maiden became somewhat snappy at times, and he in consequence had recourse to the pleasures of his club more regularly than she altogether approved of.

One day things came to a climax; the dinner had not been quite what it should be. Mrs. Lorrimer did not, as a rule, keep her servants very long, and the cook was under notice to leave, so that when the trim parlour-maid had brought in the coffee, the storm broke.

"I was looking for some stationery in your escritoire this morning, Charles, and I came across some letters signed Diana Carew. You never mentioned her name to me, I think."

"Didn't I, dear? Oh, she was an old flame of mine; used to live next door to our place in Loamshire; very jolly girl she was too."

"And what became of her, may I ask?"

"Got married."

"To whom?"

"Oh, a fellow who was no good, Lord Duncombe; ran through her money in no time, and then bolted."

"I wonder you never thought it worth while to mention her name to me, Charles."

"Oh, it was all over years before I knew you. I quite forgot I had any letters still by me; they were all very matter-of-fact, if I remember right;" he went on in as airy a tone of voice as he could command.

"I see she used to address you as 'Dear Charlie,' so you must have been pretty intimate?"

"Oh, that's nothing; we were brought up together, you

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know—oh, by the way, Hilda, I have an invitation for a dance at the Laces' next week."

"I am glad to see that some of your old friends are beginning to recognise my existence, and that reminds me, Charlie, I want some money. I have ordered a new dress at Madame Elysée's, and I want to pay her account. She does charge awfully."

"All right, my dear, you can have a tenner," said Charlie, thankful at the turn the conversation had taken.

"If you mean ten pounds, Charles, all I have to say is that that will be no good at all; this dress I have just ordered will be £10 10s. at least, and I fancy my account must already be nearer £60 than £50; you don't want me to go about like an old frump, I suppose?"

Her husband lit a cigarette before replying. "I am afraid £15 is the very most I can spare you—you see, my dear, we are living in a rather more expensive style than my income justifies! and £70 for dress. Well——"

"I beg your pardon, I said about £60."

"Yes, and then this new one which is going to cost £10 10s., you say?"

"Oh, she can wait for that."

"Yes, but it must be paid sometime, I suppose; I have meant to speak to you about your dress expenditure for some time. Your mother told me before we were married that if I allowed you £30 a year I should be doing——"

"Oh, mamma doesn't know what things cost in London; it is for your sake more than my own I dress well. You always say how necessary it is to study appearances."

"Well, it is no use arguing about it; all the money I have at my disposal until the end of the quarter is less than £50, and I cannot possibly spare you more than £15."

"I wonder what your cigar bill comes to in the year?"

"I can easily tell you; for months past I have almost always smoked a pipe."

After a few more controversial remarks the lady retired with as much dignity as she could command.

"I wonder," thought Mr. Lorrimer to himself, "whether there was anything very compromising in those letters. Poor Di, she was a good sort. It is not quite the thing to do to dun a lady for a debt, but I know she would have paid up long ago if she had ever thought of it. It's lucky Hilda did not see it, though. Perhaps she did, and did not understand what it meant."

A minute later Mr. Lorrimer opened the drawer from which his wife had a few hours ago unearthed the bundle of letters from Miss Carew.

"Ah! here it is," as he picked up an envelope in which was contained a half-sheet of note-paper bearing the words, in a bold handwriting, "I.O.U. £100, Diana Carew, July 3rd, 1887."

"Now, what's to be done? If I drop her a line she will reply by return, but Hilda would know the handwriting at a glance, and that would never do. If I go and call, some good-natured friend would be sure to tell Hilda, which would be worse still. Hold on. Yes—the very thing—I'll do it, too."

The subject of finance was not again referred to between them that evening, but the following afternoon, on his return from the Foreign Office, Mr. Lorrimer saw unmistakable signs of a storm brewing on his wife's face, and was not long in being enlightened as to the cause of her displeasure.

"I went about that new dress to-day, and the way in which people go on in London is really quite incomprehensible. Having been brought up in the country, my education in certain social matters may have been neglected, but I certainly should not expect a gentleman holding any sort of position in the country to take off his hat to a milliner, and in her own shop, too."

"And do they in London?"

"Why, the men who go to this Madame Elysée's not only take off their hats to her, but her customers chat away to her as if they were on grounds of perfect equality."

"And she isn't a particularly pretty woman either?"

"Pretty indeed—as if that ought to make any difference—why, she is as ugly as sin, and will never see forty again."

"Are you quite sure? She is a very quiet, unassuming woman."

"Oh, you know her, then?"

"And if her customers like to make themselves agreeable to her," he continued, ignoring her question, "from what you tell me of the class of people you see there, it is, you may depend upon it, the correct thing to do, and you'd better do the same. I have told you how my account stands at my bankers; you had better be civil to her until you can afford to be independent, I think."

"I shall most certainly give her a piece of my mind if she attempts any familiarities with me."

"You must please yourself, my dear."

"I mean to," was the reply.

The opportunity was not long in coming. On Mrs. Lorrimer's next visit to the Bond Street emporium she found the proprietress engaged in affable conversation with a well-known M.P. and his wife.

An assistant came forward to attend to her, and before she had concluded the mysterious operation of "fitting," Madame had taken leave of her friends, the gentleman courteously taking off his hat as he wished her good-bye, and she came forward to Mrs. Lorrimer to express a hope that everything was satisfactory.

"As satisfactory as can be expected, I suppose."

"I don't understand you, madam. I am very sorry if you have any cause for complaint."

"I have been recommended to you as a person who gave individual attention to her customers, instead of which I find myself invariably waited upon by one or other of your assistants."

"I cannot possibly be everywhere, madam, and all my helpers are thoroughly qualified to execute orders and attend to customers, even more so than I am, probably."

This was said in a quiet, ladylike tone of voice, although the speaker, a plain, middle-aged woman looked as if she could, on occasion, bandy sharp words with anybody.

"When I come to a shop I expect to be attended to by the principal."

"Very well, then, madam, it will be best for us to sever our connection; I will send in my account shortly."

"Send it in at once by all means."

Mr. Lorrimer was agreeably surprised when he next saw his wife to find her in a very good temper.

"I told you I should give that milliner woman a bit of my mind."

"And you have?"

"Yes, I have; I told her to send in her account as soon as she liked."

"And if she takes you at your word?"

"You will have to pay it."

"I have told you I can't, that is, not at present; I might in one way, though," speaking as if he had suddenly remembered something.

"I don't care how you do it so long as she is paid. What do you mean to do, borrow it?"

"No; in going through some papers in that drawer in which you found Miss Carew's letters, I came across an I.O.U. for £100, and, of course, I could get that by asking for it."

"A hundred pounds owing to you and you complain of being short of money? Really, Charlie, you are altogether incomprehensible."

"You see, my dear, this money is owing to me by a lady."

"I don't see that matters much. Not a lady of rank, I suppose?"

"She is, as it happens."

"Oh! isn't it rather a strange thing for ladies to incur debts with gentlemen?"

"I thought you might think so,

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when I decided to mention it to you, but then this isn't exactly a debt."

"What on earth is it, then?"

"A sum I won at cards some years ago now, and I imagine the fact must have escaped the lady's memory, otherwise I am sure she would have sent me a cheque long since."

"All the more reason you should remind her. I would do anything rather than be under an obligation to that Bond Street woman."

"If I get this money to-morrow I will send you a wire, and you can meet me at Madame Elysée's."

"Do you mean to call for it? If so I think you might take me. Women are so much more tactful in these matters than men."

"On second thoughts I will meet you in Bond Street to-morrow at four o'clock; I am quite sure to get the money, and I can settle by cheque afterwards."

* * * * *

Punctual to the appointed time, Mr. Lorrimer arrived in Bond Street, and after waiting something like half-an-hour he saw his wife's brougham (hired) coming along.

Mrs. Lorrimer's look of triumph gave way to one of genuine consternation when on entering the shop she saw her husband courteously raise his hat to Madame Elysée, and express himself pleased at seeing her looking so well. "My wife tells me she wants her account if you have it ready, please."

"Here it is, Mr. Lorrimer. I hope you won't think me awfully extortionate," replied Madame with a laugh.

"Just glance over it, dear, will you?" handing it to his wife, and turning to the proprietress he resumed his conversation. Presently she was called away, and Mr. Lorrimer asked his wife casually if it was correct.

"The—the items seem all right, but what does this mean, Charlie? Total £73 15s.; less due to Mr. Lorrimer on his I.O.U., £100; balance in his favour, £26 5s."

"That's the I.O.U. I spoke to you about."

"But you said your debtor was a lady of rank."

"And so she is! Madame Elysée to the world at large, Lady Duncombe to her friends. You see, when Duncombe left her she had to do something; lots of titled people are in business nowadays, and——"

"Charles, you will oblige me by calling the brougham at once!"

"Certainly, my dear, but I must just say good-bye to Lady Duncombe first."

L. Payne.

A MAN must make his own way in the world, while a woman merely has hers.

"THEY say she's worth half a million." "Well, she wants it in her business." "What's that?" "Looking for a husband."

SHE (pensively): "Ah, well! What is wealth, after all, but the mere difference between income and expenditure!" He: "So is debt."

SHE: "Why does that piano sound first loud and then soft when your sister plays it?" He: "Well, you see, she is learning to ride a bike, and uses the pedals alternately from force of habit."

"AH, beautiful lady," exclaimed the clairvoyant, "you have come to find your future husband, is it not so?" "Not much," replied the beautiful lady. "I have come to find out where my present husband is when he's absent!"

HE: "I had a queer dream about you last night, Miss Louisa. I was about to give you a kiss when suddenly we were separated by a river that gradually grew as big as the Thames." She: "And was there no bridge and no boat?"

THE blushing bride-elect was rehearsing the ceremony about to take place. "I shall expect you to give me away, papa," she said. "I'm afraid I have done it already, Caroline," replied the old man nervously. "I told your Hubert this morning you had a disposition just like your mother's."

Your Editor Chats.

LAST week I promised to tell you something more about the lady who is writing a series of her confessions as a chaperon.

All the articles have now been written and delivered, and I may say that I consider them even stronger than "The Confessions of Cynthia," which I think my readers will readily admit are extremely good. The fact which makes the new series more interesting is that the scenes are laid, not only in London, but in the chief centres of gaiety all over the Continent.

Naturally all the names of persons and places have been disguised. This is absolutely necessary, and is a condition of the terms under which the articles were written, for to give the real names would be to cause a great deal of unpleasantness and ill-feeling amongst those dealt with.

The object of the series is by no means an idle one. It is not my desire merely to arouse the interest of readers by tickling their mental palates with brightly written facts, but to give them a vivid insight into the way in which members of "the smart set" in Society pass their time.

In the last number of *Short Stories* I published extracts from certain letters which appeared in a big London daily dealing with the moral tone of "The Confessions of Cynthia," and I think that, as the matter finished up, there was everything to be said in favour of the articles, and nothing to be said against them. One half of the world is always interested to know how the other half lives. It would be of little interest to you to read of how those people in your own sphere of life manage to pass the time. You know how they do it. But, unless you are living in high Society circles, you cannot possibly know how these people live. Their methods of existence, from the time they are born until the time they die, are so absolutely different from those of the ordinary person.

No one can write about their doings except a person who has lived with them since childhood, and even then there are very, very few people who can truly and vividly portray their exact method of living. One of these very, very few people is Lady Peggy Carstairs—the name under which the new series of articles is being written. Lady Peggy is unquestionably an able writer, and I am sure that the revelations which she makes will interest you more than anything else has ever done.

The first article will appear in *Short Stories*, ready Tuesday, October 28th.

The offer of £5 for distributing leaflets of our new serial has been increased to nearly £15, and is being awarded in the shape of five splendid Gramophones, each worth, with records, about £3.

Your Editor.

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DOROTHY MERRILL had taken it into her head to be literary. The fact that she showed more decided talent for other things seemed to her no indication that she should not persevere in the matter of becoming an authoress.

She could make her own hats and dresses, she could play the piano, and she could sing. But all of these accomplishments, in her eye, were of pallid insignificance compared with the one burning ambition that possessed her.

She would be a writer. Just what steps to take she did not yet know.

Kindly disposed friends gave her varied advice. "Set about cultivating it just as you would anything else," said one who honestly thought she knew. "Take notes on people and things about you. Carry a writing pad and pencil with you always to record impressions. Get into the literary atmosphere."

Which advice sounded alluring indeed to the listener. Dorothy proceeded at once to lay in a stock of writing materials and invested also in a brand new dictionary. This she supplemented by a book of synonyms and a wonderful volume which bore the luminous title "How the Inexperienced Author May Succeed."

Miss Merrill congratulated herself that during the approaching vacation she would have ample time to follow the wonderful instructions contained in this book. By winter she would be seeing her name in print as a charming new writer of fiction.

When she went on board the steamer which was to carry her to the resort where she purposed spending the summer she buoyantly took with her pencils and writing paper.

No doubt this trip would afford her a most excellent opportunity to record impressions.

"There will be all sorts and conditions of people to study," she reflected.

It happened, however, that she did not find asserted humanity quite so interesting as she had anticipated.

After a few minutes' survey of the blank-faced, weary individuals who lounged about the cabin with parcels and lunch bags at their feet she went outside, hopeful of improvement.

She found herself confronting people even more uninteresting than those she had just left.

Lifting her trailing skirts gingerly—and unconsciously her dainty nose as well—she crossed to a seat by the railing.

At her left a vexed mother scolded two fretful children. Yielding at length to their importunities, she opened the lunch basket. Thereupon the youngsters fell to and attacked with vigour some abnormally large sandwiches and home-made cake.

Miss Merrill was not hungry and withdrew her eyes.

At her left sat a young miss in an exceedingly pronounced pink lawn dress. It had a yoke and sleeves of very open work lace. Her rose laden hat was reminiscent of a draper's shop on bargain day.

She and her sweetheart were blissfully discussing chocolate and apples. His honest face shone above a candidly clean collar and an innocent blue tie.

Miss Merrill sighed impatiently. Any author who could gather inspiration from such discouraging material deserved fame and fortune. For her part, she would give it up for the present.

Certainly there was no one in sight who would serve as the hero of a charming romance. If only some really nice young man——

Miss Merrill glanced up suddenly as there appeared in the doorway of the cabin a person whom she had not seen before.

It was as if some unseen wand were wafted and she found her uncompleted wish gratified. The young man who stood there was handsome of face, well groomed and distinguished.

He crossed to a seat not far from her and she could observe him without being observed. He brought an impression of deep, healthful tan and a flashing sweetness of brilliantly clear blue eyes.

Miss Merrill produced writing paper from her magazine and forthwith proceeded to make jottings.

Now, it must be admitted that the young man in question, although most polite as to behaviour, did not entirely conceal his interest in the maiden who wrote. Not that the fact of her writing concerned him. He was only vaguely aware that she was so engaged. The picture of the young woman herself was what engaged his thoughts. She looked so sweet and bright and fresh—so altogether wholesome and attractive.

More than once did he send a glance over his shoulder—a glance presumably aimed at the sea-green waves, but which nevertheless included the daintily clad maiden with the piquant face and dark grey eyes.

He was sorry when she left her place and went inside to listen to the music. Others followed, and soon the chairs near him were quite deserted.

There was no earthly reason why he should not follow, too, and hear the musical performance within. However, he wavered. A guilty soul is its own accuser. He felt somehow that she would divine his interest and hate him for his presumption.

So he lingered outside, still undetermined. Strolling abstractedly about among the chairs he picked up a magazine lying upon one of them.

The leaves opened at a definite place. Pages of pencilled jottings faced him.

"He was well browned and athletic, my hero, with the bluest of blue eyes, a strong but tender mouth, and—yes—a very stubborn jaw, which I like, and——"

He looked up and flushed guiltily to behold the unknown divinity beside him. She reached quietly for the magazine, with a cool frown and a murmured "Pardon me," which expressed worlds of mingled contempt and chagrin.

"Pardon me," he said quickly, with emphasis on the pronoun. "I am exceedingly sorry—I——"

But she checked further words with a cool nod of disdain.

Her looks only faintly expressed the mortification and shame that burnt within her. He had actually read it!

Her lips drew closer, her face flamed a deeper crimson.

When she left the boat at her destination and climbed into the vehicle that would take her to the Langley Hotel it was with a great sigh of relief.

The driver waited. Was it possible that she was the only party bound for the Langley Hotel? Evidently so. But no—a young man was approaching, bag in hand. It was her hero of the blue eyes!

Dorothy Merrill gave a gasp and sat with exaggerated dignity in a far corner of the seat as he entered. She would show him that she was not so foolish as her pencilled words might indicate.

As this narrative aims to tell the truth, however, it must be related that she unbent from her hauteur before the journey was over. There was a beautiful sunset, and certain remarks concerning it were not only appropriate but unavoidable.

In short, all animosity had vanished when they reached the hotel.

The hero—Joseph Hanly by name, had intended to stay only one week. He remained four.

Her affianced was not at all regretful when she decided to give up becoming an authoress.

"Bother the writing," he said. "I like you just as well without that accomplishment."

A. M. Hearst.

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A BELIEVER IN REALITIES.

A Pretty Little Story of a Fight Between Riches and Poverty.

"He is very rich and very good-looking, Amy," said Mrs. Ainsworth. "You can't do better than captivate him. I give you full leave, so far as I am concerned."

"Thank you," I responded, smiling; "but are you sure he is at liberty? Has not such a prize been secured by some one before now?"

"I think not; indeed, I am quite sure of it. You have only to go in and win."

I made no disclaimer, though this kind of conversation did not really please me; it hardly coincided with my ideas of delicacy. Not very consistent, you may say, since I was not too delicate to think about it. But then, who ever is consistent? I did not pretend to be. I thought a good deal about Mr. Otis for the next three or four days; wondered what his own style might be, and what he preferred in women. Perhaps he liked blondes best. No matter. I had tolerable confidence in my own ability to teach him to admire brunettes.

He came at last, and Mrs. Ainsworth gave a party in his honour. She was always giving parties, if she could find sufficient excuse; a temper of mind which, you may imagine, made her popular with the young folks of the neighbourhood. I wore my prettiest dress, and looked well enough; so, at least, the mirror said when I consulted it; and no eyes that met mine spoke any contradiction. I went downstairs a trifle excited, though outwardly serene. It seemed as if the meeting with Mr. Otis might be the turning-point in my fate.

But I forgot his very existence in five minutes.

He had not come alone; a friend had accompanied him—Mr. Heathcote. I could have told him, had he asked advice of me, that it was very poor policy to carry about a person so much more attractive than himself. If Mr. Otis was good-looking, Mr. Heathcote was superb. Just the tall, stately form, the deep, dark eyes, the broad, white brow, with which girls fit out a hero of romance.

He was introduced; we talked together. Of anything that came up—the weather, the place, the company. He was not the kind of man to diverge into side-paths of sentiment or poetry. Yet some people can give a charm to commonplaces; some eyes, some voices, have poetry in their very glance and tone, no matter what they say. That sounds fanciful, perhaps—but it is true; at least, in my experience.

The evening passed, and I went home; mother was sitting up for me, as usual. I told her there never was such a delightful party. She asked in what it differed from our ordinary gatherings. I could not say; there was music and dancing, as always; only it happened to be so very pleasant! Being a housekeeper, she inquired about refreshments. Did we have nice ices, and was the cake made at home, or bought? Oh! we had ices, of course, I said; or no, I wasn't certain—but it was probable, was it not? Mrs. Ainsworth always had them. As for the cake, I couldn't say; I really did not notice.

Mother looked surprised, but made no comment. "And how did you like this cousin?" she asked—"this Mr. Otis, whom we have heard so much of?"

I did not know; I had hardly seen him. We were introduced, I believed, but that was all. "But I can tell you of an acquaintance that I did make, mother—Mr. Heathcote." I paused, and did not care to expatiate upon the subject.

Mother gave a little smile, and then looked grave.

"You found him pleasant, I suppose," she answered.

"Yes," I answered—"very pleasant." I was ashamed of the colour that I felt creeping and tingling up into my cheeks. "I hope you will think the same," I added, with an effort. "He asked if he might call to-morrow, and I said yes."

As it was late, I bade her good-night.

Why could not the evening end as it began? Why must one be obliged to stop and think instead of floating on in pure enjoyment? Who was Mr. Heathcote, and would it do to find him so delightful? What had become of all my fancies about Mr. Otis? How immeasurably insignificant did the man appear, he who had filled so large a space in my plans that very morning! I was a little frightened. I said to myself, "You must be careful. You know you can't marry a poor man, however enchanting he may be." Why? Because I had long before decided that I had seen enough of poverty. It had been an inmate of our dwelling from my earliest remembrance. We belonged, indeed, to the gentry of the place, if you will not laugh at me for speaking so about a little country-town; but no one else was, or appeared to be, so limited. We had shelter, and food, and clothing, to be sure; but in everything we stopped just short of what was pleasant; the plainest necessaries were all we could accomplish. I sighed for something that should embellish life; I hoped one day to achieve it—for I thought I held the golden key that would unlock all treasures, and leave me to enrich myself at will. I was handsome, and knew it. It is so long ago that there is no harm in speaking of it now. My olive cheek mantled with a rose-red flush; my profile might have been copied for a cameo; large, lustrous eyes, dark, shining hair lit up and framed my beauty. This was my capital; I meant to make the most of it. Not that I ever thought of marrying for money; no, indeed! Oh! the gay arrogance of youth! I was to have everything; love and splendour, and luxury. All would come in time; but meanwhile it would never do to find a poor man charming.

I made a sort of compromise with myself. I knew nothing of Mr. Heathcote, had never heard his name before; for aught I could tell he was a millionaire. I must inform myself. He might prove as eligible as he was agreeable. If not—I must avoid him, that was all.

This does not look very pleasant, written down in black and white; but so I settled it. Having thus arranged for future prudence, I was at liberty to recall the evening's happiness, to dwell on certain glances, to wonder if such and such remarks

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had special meaning, or were at the service of any lady Mr. Heathcote encountered.

There was soon an end to dreaming. Breakfast was hardly over the next day when Mary Orme came in. She was just the one to tell me all I wished to know—a girl who heard everything, and repeated it as fast as she heard it. She rallied me on being so "taken up," as she expressed it, at the party, and neglecting the lion of the evening.

"Why should not Mr. Heathcote be as much a lion as the other?" I inquired.

"He is good-looking," she admitted; "not that I admire him as I do Mr. Otis. I always prefer fair men. But one is rich, and the other poor. It's a choice between a West-end mansion and a suburban villa. Oh, you need not look so vexed! Mrs. Ainsworth told me about him. He is a young lawyer, just getting into practice; very promising, and all that. But, bless me! how many promising young lawyers there are that one never hears of a second time! Not that I suppose it would make any difference to you—you're such a romantic thing!"

"I wish you would choose your words a little better," I said not half so savagely as I felt. "What have you ever seen in me of the moonstruck, maudlin sort, that you should fix such an epithet upon me?"

"Take care that you don't justify it, that's all," she said, nodding with a look of wisdom. Then mother came in, and the conversation changed.

"Justify it," indeed! Of course I wasn't going to do that. When Mr. Heathcote called, I tried to be extremely cool and self-possessed. I must be on my guard against that happy outflow of spirits, that careless yielding to the impulse of the hour, which had made last night so pleasant. Yet I was glad to see him—glad and flattered. At one moment I behaved too coldly; that would never do—rudeness was inexcusable. In trying to avoid it, I passed, perhaps, the limit I had set myself.

Then, mother, I was sure, would notice anything peculiar; this embarrassed me yet more. I grew impatient for his departure; yet, when he was gone, felt grieved and angry with myself.

I could not go on thus; I had sense enough left to see that. If I had not sufficient self-command to treat him rationally, I must keep out of his way. The next time we met I gave the brightest answers to everything he said, and left his neighbourhood as quickly as I could. It was prudent, doubtless, but not pleasant. However, when the evening ended, I was able to praise my own discretion; and wish, with all my heart, that there was no occasion for it.

A day or two after we had a picnic down the lake. We went in boats—a merry party. Mr. Heathcote was very troublesome. Apparently he liked to be with me, and indulged the preference, knowing no reason why he should not. I was unable to avoid him without rudeness, and, perhaps, was not sorry that prudence, for once, must have the go-by. It was such a happy day; I enjoyed it all the more in that it was a stolen pleasure—a something that I must not have again. We spread our tablecloths upon the grass, and set forth the feast; encountered a hundred inconveniences, and made light of all. The meal was over, coffee was served. Mr. Heathcote handed me a fragrant cup, and seated himself at my side.

"Delightful, isn't it?" he said, glancing at the waving tree-tops and bright lake. "What a relish there is in this gipsy freedom, after being pent up for months in bricks and mortar!"

"You are rather Bohemian, I fear."

"Not at all. But there is a sort of 'vagrant' instinct that awakens in such scenes; an inheritance from the old days when the race dwelt in tents. Have you never felt it?"

"Never. I should not fancy tent-life in the least."

"Are you sure? Don't you feel the charm of that unfettered, wandering existence? To rise in the morning without the least idea where you shall rest at night; to go forth, impelled by nothing but your own will; to linger or depart from any spot, just as the humour prompts? How different from the hard recurrence of our conventional ways! Life would have no chance to grow stale amid this frequent change and absolute freedom."

Facts About the Alphabet.

You know the English alphabet has twenty-six letters. Do you know the number in other alphabets? The Sandwich Islanders' alphabet has twelve letters, Burmese eighteen, Italian twenty-three, Bengali twenty-one, Spanish twenty-seven, Arabic twenty-eight, Russian forty-one, and Sanscrit fifty. There is an A B C of disease too. In various countries, climate and conditions attack various organs. In the British Isles the organs most affected are the liver and digestive system: and the A B C of health lies in keeping these healthy. Authorities agree that the use of Chas. Forde's Bile Beans is the most certain means of doing this. Mrs. W. Davidson, of Dunhead Farm, Monikie (Dundee), says:—"Indigestion and biliousness made my life one long misery for years. Night after night I had to sit up in bed racked with pain. My head often seemed as though it would split, and the pains across my back, shoulders, and stomach, were almost unbearable. I held cold, damp cloths to my head to ease the pain, and I tried to bring up the bile from my stomach by making myself sick, but it was all to no purpose.

Sometimes I would be going about doing my work, milking the cows and doing other farm work, when suddenly a mist would rise before my eyes and almost blind me. So acute were the pains in my head that my eyes would get quite black underneath. I was also subject to dizziness, and often when I crossed the farmyard I would turn so giddy and faint with pain that I had to walk about almost doubled in two. No matter what I took I could get no relief. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans were recommended and I owe my life to them. A few doses gave me relief and you may be sure after that I gave them a good trial. They have cured me entirely, and ill health is now unknown to me." Such is one case out of thousands. Wherever Bile Beans are used, beneficial results follow. Indigestion, constipation, piles, biliousness, anæmia, rheumatism, all female ailments, dizziness, and headache cannot resist their powerful yet painless action. All chemists stock them at one and three-half-pence or two and nine per box. The large box is really the most economical.

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"I doubt your being so free," I said. "You would have to consult the welfare of the herds, and go where they had pasturage and water. Bondage at once! And there would be no easy chairs in the tents—and when dinner-time came, oh! what woeful wants you would experience!"

"Perhaps you are right—if we must come down to details."

"That is always my way of looking at things," I said. "I am matter-of-fact, entirely."

"Young ladies often tell us so," he replied; "but, of course, we never believe it. They do not expect that we should."

"Indeed! But I expect it, because it is so."

"Don't!" he said, with a little lazy smile. "A touch of romance is as native to youth and beauty as the bloom to fruit.

Well—this was surely a good time to declare myself. "To youth in some circumstances, perhaps," I answered; "not to me. I look at the world in the most prosaic fashion possible."

"Why so?" he asked. "Why do you insist on brushing off the charm so early?"

"Because I am poor. I can't afford it."

"You must be poor, indeed," he said, gravely, "if you cannot afford the feelings natural to your years."

This seemed like a rebuke, and vexed me. What right had he to take that tone?

"I don't say it is of set purpose," I replied. "People are different, you know. Romance is very pretty, but so are some realities. I believe in these last devoutly."

"I congratulate you on your prudence," he said, pointedly. After that I felt a difference in his manner. What had I spoken? Mere nonsense, such as any girl might utter. So I told myself; but I did not so mean it, nor did he so understand me.

Thenceforth I had no further trouble with him. It was hard. I don't think I could have kept on my way had he not aided me so well. Had he followed me about, persisting in attentions, I should have been obliged to yield, in spite of resolutions; but I was never tempted. I felt some twinges of conscience in adopting my plan of operations; I did believe in my heart that Mr. Lorimer was attracted by me, would be pained by my behaviour. I had a sense of guilt, of something like cruelty, in determining to set him aside and think of him no more. I might have spared myself all trouble on that score. His feelings were safe, out of my power to wound. He was attentive to the other girls, especially to Mary Orme. Me he let alone. This was what I had decreed; and surely such a result should have been gratifying; but it did not gratify me. I began to be really jealous of Mary Orme. I remembered what she had said about admiring Mr. Otis. "Oh, yes!" I thought, "she would call Caliban, with money, handsomer than Apollo without it! Mercenary creature!" Here conscience aroused, and made some unpalatable remarks. I had very little to say, she averred, about anybody being mercenary. Besides, was not Mary now vindicating herself from such aspersions? Did she not show far more interest in Mr. Heathcote than in his richer friend? This view of the case suited me no better. I was afraid I would rather have had him entrapped, for a time, by a heartless manœuvrer, than have believed her honestly in love with him.

What would I not have given to know his feelings! Mary was a pleasant girl; rather pretty, very clever; and men were so fickle! "Let him go," I said, "if he wants to go—if he can console himself so soon!"

If he could change with so much ease, it certainly did not become me to mope and pine; particularly as I had taken such pains to bring this very state of things about. And the world stood just where it did before; poverty was just as painful, affluence just as much to be desired, though I had lost sight, in some measure, of the truth. I set myself seriously to cultivating Mr. Otis. He was good looking, as Mary had said, and intelligent. Very well disposed, too, to be gallant, if one offered him a crumb of encouragement occasionally. Other girls could be interested in him; why should not I, and take the good of it? I tried faithfully. Oh, but it was weary work! He used to stand at my side, chatting and playing with my bouquet, and any looker-on supposed, no doubt, that we found each other exceedingly agreeable; and all the time I hardly knew a word that he was saying. My mind was busy with the one endless theme—does he like her—does she care for him—will it come to anything?

I grew pale and thinner with this constant worry. It was bad enough now. But what if we were parted utterly? I began to doubt the wisdom of my stern resolves. Poverty was not so dreadful, after all; there were worse things in the world. Mother was not an unhappy woman, in spite of her cares and her privations; and we might not be so very poor—there was always a hope of rising. Yet, take it at the very worst, could we not bear it together? At that I flushed, half with joy and half with shame.

I fell in love presently with a picture I had conjured from the future. A little house, but, ah, so exquisitely neat! Myself, going about brightening, arranging, beautifying everything—for him! Then nightfall, the curtains drawn, the lamp shining softly over books and work; his footstep at the door; the evening at his side, with all the world shut out! What could be more delicious than poverty like this?

But how to realise these charming visions? I had sent him from me, I could not go out of my way to seek him now. Yet might not look or manner convey some signal of relenting? Would he not hail the change with joy? Yes, surely. I went in good heart about my work of reconcilement.

Only disappointment awaited me. I saw with terror that my timid wiles were all unnoticed. He did not or would not understand.

I took long, restless rambles in those days, and came back wretched from them. One day we chanced to meet. He turned and kept on with me, talking rather fitfully. As happens in such cases, we touched on dangerous themes. One word followed another, till suddenly he stopped and stood in the path before me.

"Amy," he said, seizing my hands in his, "do you love me?" I trembled from head to foot. I could not speak. "For I love you," he said, "with my whole heart! I cannot go on as we have been going lately. You have understood me, I am sure, from the very first night we met. Did you not read my heart when you warned me from you?"

I could not answer in words. But I dreaded to drive him away again. I had long repented of my foolish warning. I stole a beseeching glance at him, as much as to say, "Spare me!"

"Forgive me, dear," he said. "I am ungenerous to accuse you. I have been to blame. Determined to appear indifferent, I have pretended to admire Mary Orme. Pride, and pique, and folly, had almost led me further—this chance meeting has saved me—I see now I can never love anyone but you."

"I am punished," I said, softly.

"We have both been punished," he answered, gently. "You could love me, darling—you do!"

He drew me to him, as he spoke, and I did not resist. I was ready to forgive and forget it all; for had I not been the more to blame? My head fell on his shoulder, and I burst into tears; but they were tears of happiness, nevertheless.

Before we parted, I had told him all. I could not be fully happy till I had made my confession and been forgiven. How I had thought I could give my hand without my heart; how I had been taught to fear poverty; and how, at last, I had found that I did not know myself.

"No, you are too noble," he said. "It is not poverty, however, darling, that I ask you to accept. If I am not as rich as Mr. Otis, I have, at least, a sufficiency."

I was doubly punished, I could not, after all, make the sacrifices for him I had planned; for the "sufficiency" proved to be a handsome fortune. Our marriage, which soon took place, removed me for ever from the old atmosphere of want and limitation. Luxury surrounded me. My husband's generosity even brightened the old home, and relieved my mother's declining years of many cares. All my early dreams were realised.

My husband has risen to fame and eminence. We have everything that earth can afford. I sometimes think I am too happy. Certainly I am more happy than I deserve.

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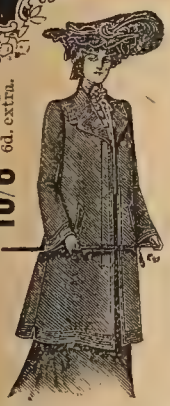

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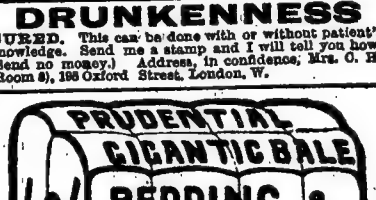

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Never had the Pretty Girl looked prettier than she did to-night, swinging gently to and fro in the hammock, her coquettish face half turned from the man who sat and watched her.

Everything was propitious for a proposal. There was moonlight and there was fragrance—such fragrance as the gods distil on dew-drenched nights to enchant a lover's soul and lure his lips to confession.

Yet Ernest Holmes failed to feel either intoxication or enchantment. He was only placidly conscious of the beauty and the allurement about her. He was aware that conditions were favourable if he wished to speak. The time, the place, the acquiescent sweetness of the Pretty Girl—all pointed that way. But in spite of the readiness of circumstances his heart maintained a fixed indifference, refusing by some stubborn law of its own to respond to the external drawing.

He was a spectator, not an actor. He had no part in this scene—could have none. Never had this fact impressed itself so forcibly upon him as now.

He found himself wondering vaguely why this should be—why it was that he had no impulse to say the thing that was expected of him—the thing which all events leading up to the present time would seem to warrant him in saying.

Why could he not feel anything deeper than admiration for this girl—this girl whose beauty had so appealed to him at first? Why could he not tell her he loved her?

How very lovely she was! A perfect figure of curves and daintiness and grace. How absolutely faultless her profile, touched by the moonlight. How luminously white her dress and the snowy carnations that nestled cool and sweet in the coils of her dark hair.

Yes, she was perfect. And yet—was he capable of no greater depth of emotion than this? Could this surface admiration, this regard for mere form, be the love of which his soul had dreamt?

Somewhere in his heart lay a hope, a dear imagining, of what real love should mean. This cherished ideal seemed to rise and face him now.

The hour wore away. Still he had not spoken the words that would bind his future to that of the Pretty Girl. It was with a sense of relief that he rose at last to go. He had preserved the dear ideal inviolate. It glowed before him brighter than before.

* * * * *

It was two months later that he met the Plain Woman.

She was not really plain, even of outward feature, but she lacked the curves, the tints, the perfection of the Pretty Girl. By contrast people spoke of her as plain. That was before they knew her, however.

After they had really come in contact with her vigorous sweetness, her wholesome charm, they recalled the former verdict and pronounced her beautiful beyond compare.

Even from the first, Ernest Holmes had a stimulating sense of her real loveliness. There was that in her individuality which appealed to the unsatisfied depths of his nature.

After he had once met her he wanted to meet her again and yet again. Like a sun-starved plant, his soul reached yearning tendrils towards the wondrous light of her glowing companionship.

He remembered the inadequate quality of that other friendship and smiled. Now he could understand. It was like the husk and the kernel contrasted.

This true and powerful attraction needed neither moonlight nor fragrance to lend it magic.

Common daylight became enchanted if he was in her presence. Her charm, her magnetism bewitched the most prosaic landscape. It was on a dim, drizzly day that he told the Plain Woman of his love. It is doubtful, however, if either he or she realised the unfavourable conditions of the elements.

In the heart of each were sunshine and skies of blue. In the soul of each was a song.

* * * * *

"I can't understand it!" said the Pretty Girl, when she heard of the engagement.

She stood staring into her mirror with wounded, incredulous eyes.

"I can't understand it!" she repeated.

She looked upon the beautiful reflection that faced her; the exquisite face, with its baby freshness, its perfect curves; the long lashed, lustrous eyes, the softly-rounded throat, the prettily-moulded arms.

"And he chose her—deliberately chose her—in preference to me. It's beyond belief."

But as she looked her mood changed. A new realisation dawned. She seemed to see herself as a mere image, an insignificant bit of flesh and blood.

A consciousness of her lack, of her insufficient soul-development, came over her all at once.

"I'm just like a stuffed doll— a dummy—a harmless, helpless, pretty piece of prettiness," she told herself.

Then she sighed and turned slowly from the mirror, still meditating.

"There's something else, after all," she mused. "Something besides beauty, and I never believed it until now."

A. M.

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

Should Girls Go to Sea?

"M. D." is twenty-one, and has a passionate desire to go abroad. She asks me if I would advise her to seek the position of stewardess on a liner, if stewardesses have "bad names," like actresses, and if it is difficult to secure a post as one.

* * * * *

Firstly, why has "M. D." such a violent desire to go abroad? In a man one can understand the desire to seek new fields for gaining wealth and experience, but unless a girl is an authoress, artist, or a serious professional of any kind, I cannot see why she must want to leave her own country, save, of course, for short periods. Further, "M. D." would not get the travel she seeks by becoming stewardess on a liner. She would only remain in port for a very few days, and a girl left alone in foreign seaports could scarcely do herself any good unless she has friends. Then the continuous tedium of work on board ship would jar on most women's nerves. I do not think stewardesses have "bad names" any more than actresses, as in both cases all depends on the person. Positions would largely be filled by those having influence and able to get introductions to principals of steamship lines. I advise "M. D." to give up this fantastic idea of getting employment on board ship and to knuckle down to home life.

Lena's Critics.

"Last summer I stayed for a week with some friends on a house-boat. While there, naturally, I made myself as agreeable as possible to the gentlemen. But whenever I was seen by my hostess and her lady friends talking to a man, I heard they were referring to me as a flirt. How, my dear Miss Morris, can a girl behave to the other sex without giving this unpleasant impression, and yet make herself agreeable?" This letter comes from "Lena," and is, I am sorry to say, not an unusual one for me to receive.

* * * *

If "Lena's" hostess is of the kind likely to make such malicious remarks, if I were "Lena" I should decline any further invitations from her. "Lena" should most certainly make herself as agreeable to men as she can, without passing the bounds of correct conduct. No man likes the stiff, prim miss, and a girl who can talk nicely will always be popular. You can afford to disregard such mischief-making people as you late hostess, "Lena," if you are confident that your own behaviour has been quite correct. There are always jealous people in the world, who seek to lay down the law for others, and it is as well to absolutely ignore them if a girl is to have any enjoyment in life.

Should He Take His Wife?

"Leonard" has been working at a business without success. He is married to a girl with a lot of relations, of whom she is very fond. He thinks he would do well at his business in the Colonies. If he continues his present work he is afraid he can never make a good living. Should I advise him to go abroad, though his wife would have to be parted from her people?

Every man ought to consider his wife before making such a change, and I am glad "Leonard" is doing so. Assuming him to be right in what he says about his business, I think he ought to take whatever steps are necessary for success in life. But it would be very unkind of him to take his wife out to the Colonies unless he has some definite prospects to go upon. If he is serious in this idea, why should he not go out first himself, leaving his wife to be looked after by her people? If prospects out there are good, and he sees chances of success, he might ask her to follow him after a certain time. If they are not good, then he should arrange to be able to return home and resume his old work without loss of connection. It is certain that if he is going out on speculation, he should not take his wife with him at first. A woman could not share with him the privations he might have to undergo.

How to Address the Unknown.

How should a man address a girl he does not know? "Jackie" is in love with a girl he has seen about, but sees no other means of getting to know her than by writing to arrange an appointment. Should he address her as "Madam," and sign himself "Yours respectfully," and how should he couch the wording of such a letter?

* * * *

I should think "Jackie" had better omit any such expression as "Madam" in writing to her. It sounds stiff and formal, and quite unsuited to such a letter. He should write without any word of address. And as for "yours respectfully" it sounds ridiculous. Better omit any such expression before the signature. Couching a letter such as this must depend on "Jackie's" literary style. If I were he I should say something like this—"I should very much like to meet you. I have long admired you. Would it be presumptuous to ask if my wish is returned? If so I shall be at—— at such and such a time." Formality would be out of place in a letter of this kind.

The Lorn Lover.

"Maisie" has been receiving attentions from a man for whom she does not care. He is a solitary individual, with few friends and very little knowledge of women. But the other day he told her she was the only woman he had ever loved, and asked her if she could return it. Now "Maisie" was very sorry for him, and not wishing to give him a pang, allowed him to think she really did care for him, whereas she really has no serious feeling at all. Was she wrong in doing this, and how can she best extricate herself from the position without driving the man to despair?

* * * *

"Maisie" would have been better advised had she told him at the very outset that she could not care for him. It might have been a blow, but one that would have been more easily recovered from than the present one. I think she had better now make a clean breast of her state of mind, telling him just how far she likes him. There is no reason why she should not continue his friendship. It should not be necessary to give him the pang of parting, as there should be no obstacle to friendship.

A Case for Kindness.

"E. F. C." used to know a man, and at one time there had been some intimacy between them. But for a long time they had seen nothing of each other. The other day she heard that he was lying seriously ill in hospital. Would it be wise for her to visit him?

* * * *

She should write to him expressing her sympathy, and say that if he would like to see her she would be very glad to visit him. One cannot be too kind to those who are suffering, and "wise" or not, it would be a gracious action which could do "E. F. C." no harm.

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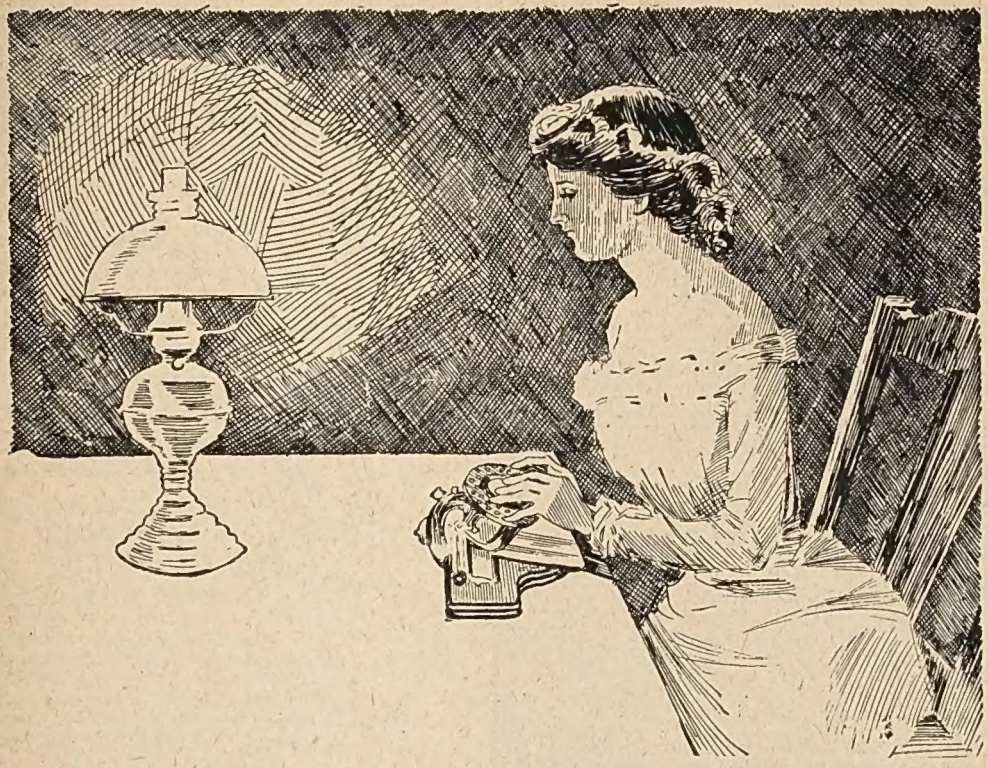

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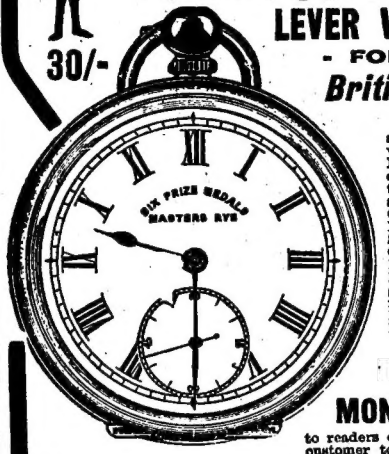

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